WITH JOFFRE *on the* BATTLE LINE

ROSS KAY

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"You are an American, I hear," said the general, addressing Leon in excellent English.

(*Page* 152.) *Frontispiece.*

WITH JOFFRE ON THE BATTLE LINE

BY

ROSS KAY

Author of "The Air Scout," "The Search for the Spy," "Dodging the North Sea Mines," etc.

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WITH JOFFRE ON THE BATTLE LINE

CHAPTER I

A START FOR THE FRONT

"MY arm and shoulder feel just as fit as they ever did."

"You are a very lucky young man. If that bullet had gone only a little farther to the right you would not be dancing around in this fashion."

Leon Platt was talking to a Red Cross nurse. He was a young American, only seventeen years of age. Traveling in Belgium at the outbreak of the great war in 1914, he had been caught between the battle lines. On his way from Liége to Brussels he had chanced to meet a young French aviator, Jacques Dineau, by name. These two boys had formed a warm friendship earlier in the summer and it was a great surprise to both when they met again so unexpectedly in Belgium.

The young American had already had some thoughts of enlisting in the army of France. His

ancestors had been French, so he was naturally drawn to that country rather than to any other. Jacques exerted all his influence to persuade his friend to join the French army and Leon needed but little persuading. He readily consented to the pleadings of the young French airman and soon found himself enrolled as a member of the Army of the Republic.

Leon had been assigned to duty as an air scout in conjunction with his friend Jacques. The young Frenchman drove the aëroplane while Leon acted as scout. Many thrilling experiences they passed through together, and much valuable information had they acquired for their troops.

They had watched the great army of the Kaiser roll on through Belgium in its mad drive for Paris. Oftentimes they had come in closer contact with this army than they desired. Slowly they had retreated with the allied forces, as yet unprepared to withstand the rush of the Germans; they had fallen back stubbornly, however, fighting every inch of the way.

Finally had come the great battle at Charleroi, and Mons. Leon and Jacques had been in the trenches there and had their first experience on the battle line. Needless to say, they acquitted themselves with honor, and in a daring rescue of a French flag Leon had been wounded in the shoulder. He had been taken to a hospital in Mons

and cared for there. There it was that the conversation recorded at the beginning of this story took place.

"Yes," exclaimed Leon, "it is as good as new."

"What are you going to do now?" inquired the nurse.

"Such a question to ask! I'm going to join my regiment, of course."

"Do you know where it is?"

"No, I don't."

"Do you know that the whole allied army has been driven back almost to the gates of Paris?"

"No, I didn't know that," replied Leon.

"Well, it's so, just the same," said the nurse. "Between you and your regiment are thousands and thousands of German soldiers. I don't see how you expect to make your way through them. There isn't one chance in a hundred that you will succeed."

"How do you know all these things?" demanded Leon.

"I'm telling you the reports we have received."

"Just the same, I'm going to make a try for it."

"Do you suppose you can even get out of this city?"

"Why not?"

"The Germans are in control here and do you think they are going to allow any man to leave

who wants to help the very people they are fighting?"

"You mean there are German soldiers here in this town?"

" I believe so. Not many of them, I hear, but still there are no French or English troops at all."

"It'll be hard work, all right," said Leon thoughtfully. "Still I think it can be done and you may be sure I shall make an attempt."

"Good luck to you," said the nurse. "You'll need good luck, too. When do you start?"

"What time is it now?"

"Half past four," replied the nurse, consulting her watch.

"I am discharged from the hospital, am I not?" asked Leon.

"Absolutely."

"All right, then; I shall start as soon as it is dark."

"Very well. What few possessions you have are in the office. Before you leave come there and you may have them, and I will also try to secure a little food for you."

"Thank you very much," said Leon warmly. "I'll be there in about half an hour."

The nurse left him to go on with her work of caring for the wounded. The hospital was crammed to its capacity with the wounded of all sides. Germans lay in cots alongside French-

men; Irish, English, and Belgians were also in evidence, Scotchmen were among the sufferers, while now and then a black Turco appeared, stricken in one way or another.

The hospital was a busy place, and a sad place, as well. Here the results of the great game of war were much in evidence. Most of the wounded were young men in the prime of life and health, and many would leave the place mutilated for life. Here a man had lost a leg; there a man had had an arm shot away. Sometimes it was found necessary to amputate a limb to save the life of a sufferer. Sometimes nothing would avail and the occupant of a cot would be carried out, never to return.

His place was immediately filled, however, and soon the other men became hardened to these frequent scenes and paid but scant attention to them. Leon had noticed one thing, however. No matter how badly a man was wounded or how much he suffered, he always wanted to get out and fight again. Every man looked forward eagerly to the day when once more he could rejoin his colors.

Leon himself was no exception to this rule, and as he was only human, he was naturally impatient to be in action again. He sat on the step outside the hospital and pondered over in his mind the best method of accomplishing his purpose.

So wrapped up in his thoughts was he that he failed to notice a man approaching on crutches.

"What are yez thinkin' about, me bye?"

Leon looked up startled by the unexpected question.

"Hello, Pat," he said. "I didn't see you coming."

"Yez should be able to hear me thin. These wooden legs Oi hov are not viry quiet. Oi nivver saw any one so dape in thought as youse, Oi must say."

"I was thinking of some way to get back to my regiment," said Leon. "I have been discharged from the hospital and I leave to-night."

Pat was an Irishman with whom Leon had become acquainted soon after he had joined the allied army. They had both been wounded at the same time and had occupied adjoining cots in the hospital. As the big Irishman heard Leon speak, his eyes flashed.

"If Oi could only be wid ye," he exclaimed, eagerly. "Wait a few days and take me along."

"I wish you could go with me," said Leon, "but I can't wait. I can't stay here very well and I am anxious to be back."

"Oi don't blame ye. Oi'll be sthartin' meself purty soon."

"Do you think I can make it?" inquired Leon.

"Why can't yez?" demanded Pat. "It'll not

be an aisy job, but Oi know Oi could do it, so why can't youse do it, too?"

"I can do it, of course," exclaimed Leon, springing to his feet. "It's just as you say, Pat, it'll be hard but it can be done all right. Nothing is impossible if you only have the right spirit, and that's what you've given me."

"Do you know where your rigiment is?"

"No, but I'll find it somewhere."

"Thot's the way t' talk!" cried Pat, trying to slap Leon on the back, and almost losing his balance as a consequence.

"I'm going to get ready now," said Leon. "Good-by, Pat."

"Good-by, and good luck," said Pat heartily. "Take care o' yerself an' Oi hope t' see yez soon agin."

"I certainly hope so, too," exclaimed Leon, as he disappeared inside the hospital.

He made his way to the office and there found the nurse waiting for him, as she had promised. She had his blanket and automatic revolver—all the things that had been rescued for him. In addition, she had an extra pair of socks, a very important item of clothing. When a man walks many miles a day his feet must be taken care of if he is to stand up under the strain.

This was all the clothing he possessed, aside from his uniform, which he wore. He had but

little money and his undertaking seemed almost a hopeless one at the start. His friend, the nurse, had provided him with a parcel containing food, however, and consequently he was assured of at least one or two meals.

Night had now fallen. Leon expressed his thanks to his benefactcr and prepared to leave. He swung his blanket over his shoulder. Rolled inside were his extra socks and his food. His revolver he placed in his hip pocket, and he was ready to set out.

He extended his hand to the nurse, thanked her once more, and turned to go.

"Good luck," she said in a low voice as Leon stepped out of the door and vanished into the night.

CHAPTER II

A CLOSE CALL

IT was with mingled feelings that the young American departed on his perilous journey. He was aware more fully every minute what a difficult task he had undertaken, and as he made his way down the dark and deserted street the realization of the situation he was in came to him with full force.

He thought of his home in America and wondered what his family were doing now. When he had enlisted they had not known of his action. He wrote them, of course, but so far he had received no reply. Neither had he heard from his twin brother, Earl. The two boys had gone abroad together in the early part of the summer, but had separated. Earl had remained in England to visit friends, while Leon had crossed to France to stay for a time with an aunt and uncle in Paris.

Leon had had no news of Earl since the war broke out and he wondered what he now was doing or thinking. The two boys were exceedingly fond of each other and Leon naturally was worried about his brother. As he thought of all these

things a wave of homesickness swept over him, and for a moment he longed for home.

This feeling passed as quickly as it came, however, and the young soldier chided himself for having yielded to the impulse. Once more he was a soldier of France, enthusiastic and eager to join his regiment on the battle front. Immediately he became alert and sensitive to his surroundings.

Keeping as close as possible to the buildings he made his way toward the south and the open country. Few lights appeared in the houses and thus far he had seen no one on the streets. He was wide awake to every possibility, however, and was careful that no one should take him by surprise. Every few seconds he felt for his automatic revolver and the bulge in his hip pocket made him more comfortable every time he assured himself of its presence.

There was no moon and practically no lights in the town. Everything was covered with the blanket of darkness so that it would have been a hard task to see any one approaching unless he was very close by.

Suddenly Leon stopped.

He thought he heard footsteps down the street, and instinctively he drew back into the shadow of an alley. He listened carefully and was now positive that he had been correct. Whether it was a

friend or foe he could not tell but it was probably a foe. No Frenchman would be out at night in a town which the Germans had taken.

Closer and closer came the foot beats, while in the alley Leon tried to flatten himself against the brick wall of a building. A second more and the man would come into view.

Leon peered intently into the night, and as he looked a German helmet became outlined to his view against the sky. A gun to which was affixed a long bayonet was over the German's shoulder and the tramp of his heavy shoes echoed through the empty street.

Directly in front of Leon the man stopped. Resting his rifle on the ground he stood still and looked all about him in a careless fashion, apparently sure that he had nothing to fear.

Leon watched him as if spellbound. He had no desire for an encounter just now, before he had put much more than a mile between himself and the hospital. He scarcely dared to breathe, so fearful was he that he would be discovered.

He pressed closer to the wall in an effort to obliterate himself from sight. As he did so he dislodged a piece of loose mortar which fell to the ground with a rattle.

Immediately the German wheeled like a flash in the direction of the sound, and held his gun ready for instant use.

A challenge in the German language broke the silence of the night.

Leon made no reply, except stealthily to draw his revolver and shrink farther into the shadow. He hoped the German would pass on, but such was not to be the case.

The challenge was repeated and the German began to walk slowly in Leon's direction. He was evidently curious and determined to discover the cause of the fallen mortar. Even in the tight place in which the young American found himself he could not help thinking how brave and yet how foolhardy his enemy was.

Seeing that there was no chance of the German going away without investigating, Leon did the only thing he could do under the circumstances.

Pointing his revolver at the dark figure of the approaching German, he fired.

The report rang out in the still night air, and without waiting to discover the effect of his bullet Leon turned and ran. He desired to be out of trouble of any sort just now, especially any that might interfere with his journey southward.

At top speed he ran down the street, rushing blindly ahead with little thought of whither he was bound.

Scarcely had he gone thirty yards when a rifle shot rang out behind him and a bullet sang past his ears. Evidently his revolver shot had not

done its work. He heard a shout of anger and another bullet also whizzed over his head.

He did not slacken his pace, however, but increasing his speed he kept on his way. He knew the German stood small chance of hitting him now, and he smiled at the thought of his being able to catch him. Unless he ran into more danger ahead, Leon decided that he was almost out of trouble, at least for the present.

Hardly had this thought passed through his mind when a figure sprang from behind a near-by tree and tried to seize him as he sped along. This time it was Leon's turn to be taken by surprise. He was running swiftly, however, and he was not a light weight by any means. His assailant was thrown aside by the shock of the contact and failed to hold his grip on the fleeing young American.

Leon wheeled and fired three shots from his automatic at the man who was trying to oppose his progress. Then he turned and once more sped on down the street.

This second man fired no shots at Leon, however. Whether it was because he had no gun or because his own shots had taken effect, Leon did not stop to consider. He was in a bad predicament which was evidently getting worse. There was no telling how many more Germans he might meet before he got out of town and he decided

that the open street was not a desirable place for him to be in. Slackening his pace gradually, he suddenly darted to one side and made his way toward the rear of a neighboring house. That he evidently was approaching the outskirts of the town was apparent from the fact that the houses here were somewhat scattered and were farther apart.

He crouched low and remained within the shadows as much as he was able. The house evidently was deserted for no lights appeared in the windows. Leon, however, was not planning to take many chances. He came to the rear of the house and there discovered several outbuildings ahead of him, among which he recognized a barn and toolhouse. The place was evidently a farm.

Leon decided that his best plan would be to hide for an hour or so in the shelter of the barn. By that time he believed he would be free from pursuit at the hands of his former assailants. He would eat some of his scanty store of food and then strike out across the country. He realized that his traveling would have to be done mostly at night when the risk of detection would not be as great as in the daytime.

With this purpose in mind he started to run across the open space of ground between the house and the barn. Once behind the barn he felt he would be comparatively safe.

At top speed he made his way across the open space. A moment later he reached the barn and continued on to its rear. Reaching the corner of the building he dodged quickly around, only to run headforemost into a man approaching from the opposite direction.

CHAPTER III

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING

THE shock of the collision was enough to send the man sprawling. Leon was absolutely taken by surprise, but he had presence of mind enough to draw his revolver and cover the prostrate figure on the ground at his feet.

"Surrender!" cried Leon, out of breath and forgetting that his adversary probably understood no English.

The man on the ground had uttered a smothered exclamation of surprise when they collided, but otherwise had made no sound.

"Get up! Throw up your hands!" ordered Leon in a sharp tone.

The man did not move.

"Get up or I'll blow you up," Leon exclaimed, still unmindful that the man undoubtedly did not understand a word he was saying.

Leon advanced to the place where the man was lying and gave him a sharp kick squarely in the ribs.

"I'll give you one last chance!" he exclaimed.

"Get on your feet and surrender, or I'll not wait for you any longer."

"Please don't do that, Leon. I will get up."

So great was Leon's surprise at hearing himself addressed in this fashion, that he almost dropped his revolver.

"Who are you?" he demanded, thunderstruck.

"Don't you know me?" exclaimed the man still lying quietly on the ground. "I think you should apologize after the way you knocked me down."

A suspicion of who this man was began to dawn on Leon. And yet he thought his surmise could not possibly be correct. At the same time the voice sounded strangely familiar.

"Don't you know me yet?" inquired the man, slowly rising to his feet.

"Jacques!" cried Leon suddenly.

"It is I," replied Jacques, for it was he beyond any doubt.

"What are you doing here?" exclaimed Leon delightedly.

"What are *you* doing here, I should like to know?" said Jacques. "You ought to be in the hospital and yet here you are running over the country, knocking your best friends down and threatening to blow their heads off."

The two boys almost hugged each other, they were so happy to be together again. For the last few weeks they had passed through numberless

dangers together and they had come to feel as if they were almost necessary to each other. Jacques Dineau, the young French airman, had gained a very warm spot in the heart of the young American who had shared his fortunes so closely.

All through the first Belgian campaign they were together constantly and when Leon had been wounded, one of his chief causes of annoyance was that he had become separated from his comrade. And here he was again, suddenly appearing almost as if he had sprung out of the earth.

"Where is our regiment?" demanded Leon.

"I cannot tell you, though I wish I could."

"Why aren't you with it?"

"It's a long story, Leon. After the battle of Mons I became separated from the rest of our troops. I was nearly captured many times and it was only by the best of luck that I escaped. For days I hid in barns and vacant houses, eating whatever I could lay my hands on. Then the Germans went south and I dared to venture forth once again. I had known that you were taken to the hospital in Mons when you were wounded, so I was on my way there to obtain news of you if possible. If you had blown my head off I should never have seen you again, do you know that?"

"Thank heaven, I didn't!" exclaimed Leon earnestly.

"What were those shots I heard a few moments ago?"

"They were fired at me," said Leon, and he quickly related his recent experiences to Jacques.

"If the Germans are after you we must be more careful," said the young Frenchman, lowering his voice.

The two boys cautiously withdrew to a position behind a huge haystack and there related to each other what had happened to them since last they had been together. Leon produced his package of food and the two boys partook sparingly of it.

"Where are you bound?" asked Jacques at length.

"To rejoin our regiment, of course. What do you intend to do?"

"The very same thing. I intended to find you, if possible, and then start out with you to locate our troops."

"Have you any idea where they are?" inquired Leon.

"Not the slightest. From what little I hear, however, they have been driven far to the southward. An old peasant woman told me yesterday that the Germans expected to take Paris very soon. They all said so when she saw them. She said they were marching fast, sometimes thirty miles a day, and that the allied armies were fleeing before them. It certainly looks bad for us."

"They'll never take Paris," exclaimed Leon.

"I hope not," said Jacques sadly. "They did it in 1870 though, you must remember. That was the terrible year, *l'année terrible* as we say in my language."

"I know," protested Leon, "but because they did it then doesn't mean that they can do it now. Germany was all prepared for this war while the other nations weren't. They have a start on us and it is only natural that they should win at first. Wait until we can bring an equal number of men up to oppose them, then you'll hear a different story. Take my word for it, the Germans will never capture Paris on this trip."

"I hope you are right. I myself have such a feeling deep down inside of me too, but not as strong as yours."

"If we were only with our men," sighed Leon.

"Let's start now," exclaimed Jacques, springing to his feet. "We must make good time tonight for we may not be able to travel very far in the daytime."

"That's right," agreed Leon, slowly rising as he spoke.

"Does your shoulder pain you?" inquired Jacques.

"Not a bit. Why do you ask?"

"I thought you favored it slightly as you got up."

"No," said Leon, "it is as good as ever."

"I'm very glad of that. Before we reach our regiment again we shall probably need all the strength and endurance we have. It is not going to be an easy task."

"I guess not, but we'll get there all right."

The two boys were making their way across the field keeping a sharp lookout in all directions for possible surprises. As they had said, there was a hard task ahead of them. Just how hard it would be neither one realized for a moment. It would be impossible for any one to foresee the risks, dangers and hardships that must be undergone before they should gain their goal. That is, if they ever should gain it.

"Do you suppose we shall have to walk all the way?" said Leon, after they had marched along in silence for some time.

"We may be able to get a ride."

"On the railroad?"

"I doubt that. You see, all the railroads between here and the front of the German advance must be in their hands. Railroads are the first things an army seizes when it invades another country."

"Of course," agreed Leon, "and I suppose they are bringing up troop-trains loaded with fresh soldiers all the time."

"They certainly are," said Jacques. "I saw

at least ten trains filled with troops pass to the south only yesterday."

"Where were you?"

"In the attic of a deserted house, alongside the railroad track."

"What were you doing there?" exclaimed Leon in surprise.

"Spending the day," laughed Jacques. "I have had to spend every day for a long time now in some such place, just as you and I will probably be forced to do, too."

"How do you think we can get food?"

"I have been thinking of that. I believe that the best thing for us to do is to keep as far as possible from the main roads. Back in the country districts we shall be less liable to capture or to any trouble of that kind. At the same time we shall stand more chance of obtaining food. I am sure the peasants will look out for us."

"Do you think there are any peasants left?"

"Why not?" said Jacques.

"I thought they might all be with the army."

"Well, the young men probably are, but the women will still be in their homes. The harvests are ripe now and there should be plenty of food."

"Unless the Germans have seized it all."

"That may have happened, too," Jacques assented. "Let us hope not, however. The main body of the army will stick close to the railroads,

and if we get away from them we probably shan't run into any German troops at all."

"How about the Uhlans?" said Leon. "They are everywhere it seems to me. They will have raiding parties all over the country."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Jacques. "The cavalry usually goes in advance of the army, you know, and we are in the rear."

"That's true, I never thought of that. I guess you know more about soldiering than I do, Jacques."

"I have had more experience," said the young Frenchman simply. "When you have served as long as I have you will know more than I do."

"I know one thing right now," exclaimed Leon, "and that is, I'm tired."

"We may secure a ride in some peasant's cart," said Jacques. "At any rate it is nearly dawn and we should rest soon."

In the east a faint streak of light appeared. The day was evidently approaching. In front of them the two boys heard the crowing of a rooster welcoming the rising sun.

"Did you hear that?" exclaimed Jacques. "We are evidently approaching a house of some kind. Perhaps there is a barn in which we may hide for the day."

Sure enough, the two young soldiers came within sight of a few buildings as they reached

the top of a hill. A small farm lay spread out at their feet and there they decided to spend the day.

Reconnoitering the land, they cautiously approached the barn with the intention of hiding away in the haymow, at least until they should find out if the farm was inhabited by friend or foe.

As they drew near they saw no one and heard no sound. A moment later they came to the barn and entered.

CHAPTER IV

A NEW ALLY

"MON DIEU!"

This startling exclamation greeted the two boys as they stepped inside the supposedly empty building. Instinctively they drew back quickly and placed their hands upon the butts of their revolvers. In the dim light of the early morning it was impossible to see who it was that had cried out at their entry, but both recognized the exclamation as French. It also seemed to be in a woman's voice.

There was a great scurrying and rushing about in the barn. Some one seemed greatly excited and boxes and barrels were overturned as the excitable inmate ran about the place.

"Who is there?" called Jacques in his own language.

"Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!"

There was no other reply. It was evidently a woman's voice and she seemed badly frightened.

"Come along," said Jacques, turning to his comrade. "It is only a poor peasant woman whom we have frightened half out of her wits."

"Do not be afraid. We are French and friends of yours," Jacques called out again, as he spoke to the woman.

Leon could not understand what his friend was saying, but he supposed it was all right, and he followed closely behind him as he made his way into the barn.

At first no one was to be seen. The boys searched in every nook and corner of the building, under carriages and in the stalls, only to be disappointed. Jacques frequently called out in a loud voice that they were French and would do the woman no harm, but she refused to respond.

"Here she is," exclaimed Leon at length. "Come and talk to her, Jacques."

Leon had lifted the cover of a large feed box and inside discovered the object of their search. A middle-aged French woman was crouching in one corner shaking with fear. At the sight of Leon her teeth began to chatter with fright and she also began to talk as fast as she was able. Naturally what she said was lost on the young American, for he knew but little French, and was not able to understand a real Frenchman when once he got started. It seemed almost incredible to him that people could talk as fast as they did.

Jacques approached at Leon's call and did his best to reassure the frightened woman. He so far succeeded that in a few moments she came

forth from her hiding place, although as yet she did not entirely trust her two visitors.

"She thought we were Germans," explained Jacques.

"I should imagine that was the trouble," laughed Leon. "I never saw any one so frightened in all my life."

"Maybe she's had some experience with them."

The woman stood watching the two young soldiers from a short distance. She was still shaking from her nervousness and the effects of the fright she had received, but evidently she was becoming more convinced every moment that she was with friends.

She spoke to Jacques and for a short time they carried on a conversation, very little of which Leon could comprehend. Every now and then he caught a word or phrase, and the one that pleased him most of all was what he thought to be the word meaning "eat."

That he was correct in his surmise was soon manifest.

"She has invited us to have some breakfast," Jacques announced at last, turning to his friend.

"That's fine," exclaimed Leon heartily. "You said we would accept, all right, didn't you?"

"Yes, and we'd better go into the house now."

"All that's necessary is for you to show me the way," said Leon.

In a very short time the two young soldiers were seated in a cozy little kitchen, while the odor of frying bacon and hot coffee filled their nostrils.

Jacques kept up a steady conversation with their hostess.

She seemed to be the only inmate of the house, and this turned out to be the case. Her husband and two sons were all at the front. She was left behind to manage her little farm and live as best she was able. Just now her crop of hay was in the fields ready to be brought in. Water would spoil it and even now the sky threatened rain. She had only one horse left to her; an animal too old to be of use to either army.

Jacques communicated all this information to his comrade, who at once suggested a plan.

"Let's help her get her hay in," he cried enthusiastically.

"Ought we to spend our time that way?" protested Jacques, doubtfully. "I'd like to do it, but I feel that perhaps we ought to hurry on as quickly as possible."

"It won't take long. Let's do it."

"Very well, if you say so."

When Jacques communicated this news to their hostess she was almost overcome. Such unexpected aid seemed far too good to be true. She soon perceived, however, that the two boys were

serious in their offer, and from that moment she could hardly do enough for them.

"This is something like!" exclaimed Leon heartily, when a few moments later they were busily partaking of a piping hot breakfast.

"It surely is," agreed Jacques, "but I must say I feel tired."

"That's right, we have been up all night, haven't we?" laughed Leon.

"Didn't you know that?"

"I had almost forgotten it. I was so happy to be on my way again that I had forgotten almost everything else, especially when I saw all this food."

"Well, I am nearly played out," said Jacques. "I don't know how long I shall be able to keep awake out there in the fields."

"Long enough, I guess," said Leon. "There isn't very much hay and all we'll have to do is to bring it into the barn. That won't take very long."

"Come on, then," exclaimed Jacques, rising from the table as he spoke.

Leon reluctantly followed him, regretfully leaving the food that remained uneaten.

A short time later, armed with pitchforks, they were hard at work. The peasant woman managed the horse and wagon, while the two boys made the load. As Leon had predicted not much

time was consumed and when two hours had passed the task was completed. For one lone woman, however, the labor would have proved a most difficult undertaking, and her gratitude was correspondingly sincere.

"Can't we sleep here to-day?" asked Leon of his comrade as they walked back to the house after their work.

"I guess so. I'll ask our hostess."

This he proceeded to do and she not only agreed to the suggestion, but practically insisted upon the further acceptance of her hospitality by her guests. She led the way to a small room on the second floor where a huge feather bed offered a hearty welcome to the two tired young soldiers. They lost no time preparing for the welcome rest.

"Did you tell her to call us at dark?" asked Leon.

"I did. She also promised to keep a lookout for any wandering bands of Germans. I think we don't need to worry."

"She'll do her best for us, that's sure. Has she seen any German troops lately?"

"Two days ago a squad of Uhlans stopped here."

"Did they take anything?"

"There was nothing to take except two hams and a barrel of flour which she had hidden safely away in the barn."

"Pretty lucky, I should say," exclaimed Leon. "Good night."

"Good morning you mean, don't you?"

"I guess maybe I do. Anyway, I'm going to sleep."

It seemed to the two boys that they had been asleep only a few moments when a loud knocking at the door aroused them. Leon was the first to awake and after a great deal of shaking he managed to make Jacques, too, open his eyes.

"Who is it?" called Jacques in French.

The peasant woman answered that it was fast growing dark and that they should once more be on their way.

The boys were soon downstairs, ready to start. Their hostess had prepared dinner for them, among the articles of food being generous slices of the precious ham, and bread made from the rescued flour.

Jacques protested against this lavishness, but to no avail. Nothing was too good for a soldier of France, the grateful woman maintained, and she purposed to give them the best she had. After dinner she engaged Jacques in a long and earnest conversation. Leon, completely mystified, listened in a vain effort to catch the meaning of it all.

Jacques was protesting vigorously, but the woman only became more insistent in what she

was saying. When she brought a woman's sunbonnet and dress and handed them to his friend, Leon gave up trying to solve the riddle.

At length Jacques seemed to agree to what the woman had said, and she hurried smiling out of the house.

"She has given us her horse and cart," said Jacques, turning to his comrade. "I am going to dress up as a woman and drive it."

"We won't take it," exclaimed Leon warmly.

"Oh, yes, we will. At first I thought we would refuse it, too, but I've changed my mind. She would be heartbroken if we didn't do as she wants us to."

"How are we going to manage it?"

"You'll know all about it in a very short time."

CHAPTER V

A STRANGE CONVEYANCE

FIRST of all Jacques dressed himself in the garments the peasant woman had given him. Covering his other clothes he put on the dress and when he had donned the sunbonnet, he made a very good looking girl. His cheeks were rosy, and his figure slight. Unless scrutinized too closely he might easily pass as a young country girl.

"You're all right," laughed Leon. "You want to keep your feet out of sight though, for I hope no one would ever accuse a French girl of having feet the size of yours."

"Do you think I will pass in other respects?"

"You certainly will. You're a fine looking girl."

"Come then, and we will start on our journey at once."

In the barn they found their hostess waiting for them. She had hitched the horse to a wagon loaded with hay and everything appeared to be in readiness for their departure.

"How can I go along in this way?" exclaimed

Leon. "I can't pass as a Frenchman. I don't look like one and I don't know but a very few words of the language."

"That is all arranged for," Jacques assured him.

"How?"

"I'll show you at once."

He spoke rapidly to the peasant woman who smiled delightedly at his words. Turning to Leon she beckoned him to approach and then she showed him a remarkable thing.

Mounting the wagon she dug busily in the center of the hay for a few moments. The two boys watched her excitedly, and though Jacques evidently knew the secret he was as interested as his friend.

Under the hay appeared a wire cage, in some respects similar to a huge rat trap. It was crudely made and what its use had been Leon had no idea. This cage formed a space in the middle of the hay-load, perhaps four feet square, the bottom of the contrivance resting on the wooden boards of the wagon.

Here Leon evidently was expected to remain while they were on the road. All about him the hay would be piled so that he would be completely hidden from sight.

"What do you think of that?" exclaimed Jacques.

"Why, it seems to be all right," said Leon somewhat dubiously. "It doesn't look very comfortable and I wonder if I can breathe in there."

"You didn't expect comfort, did you? At any rate it's far easier than walking. As for breathing, there is no doubt about that; the hay will be piled loosely about you and you will be perfectly all right."

"Did you think of this scheme?"

"No; our hostess here was the inventor. She told me all about it in the house. She thinks it is fine because now we can travel day times as well as at night."

"Do you think so too?"

"I don't see why not, if I can pass myself off as a woman."

"I hope you can do that," laughed Leon. "If you are caught it means trouble for me just as much as for you. Suppose some one should set fire to this load of hay while I am inside."

"At any rate you'd keep warm," said Jacques consolingly.

"I never expect to be as cold as that," replied Leon earnestly.

"Yes," he continued, "this conveyance seems all right to me."

"Let's start then."

They shook hands with the poor peasant woman who had befriended them. They were profuse in

their thanks to her, and she in turn was just as grateful for the help the young soldiers had given her. She begged Jacques to be on the lookout for the men of her family, and this he promised to do. She gave them careful directions as to the route they should follow and now they were ready to start.

Leon climbed upon the hay-load and prepared to conceal himself. In his little room were placed the blankets and the few possessions the young soldiers owned. The blankets helped to make him comfortable and to lessen the jolting of the wagon.

"Have we everything?" he asked of Jacques as he prepared to descend.

"I think so. How about your revolver?"

"It is in my pocket. Do you want me to keep yours?"

"No, indeed, I much prefer it right where it is."

"Suppose you are caught with it."

"I guess if I am caught, it won't make much difference whether or not I have a gun."

"That's true enough, to be sure. All right then, here goes!"

Leon scrambled down the pocket into the hay. There was a door on the top of the cage through which he descended. Then Jacques and the peasant woman piled the hay all about him so that the

wagon appeared to be carrying nothing but its load of fodder.

"Can you breathe?" inquired Jacques in a low voice.

"Perfectly. You didn't put very much hay around me, did you?"

"Only enough to hide you surely. This is a very small load anyway, you know."

"I'm fixed fine in here," said Leon. "Can you hear me talk all right?"

"Just as well as ever. Are you ready to start?"

"Go ahead," called Leon.

In another moment the two young soldiers were once more on their way to join their regiment. The wagon bumped along over the rough barnyard, but as soon as the boys reached the road the riding became much easier.

Leon did not cease wondering at the marvelous roads all over France. Here they were almost at the northern border and the same broad white roads were to be found there as existed nearer Paris.

He was very comfortable in his little compartment and happy too, except that he would have liked to see where they were going.

"Is there any moon?" he asked of Jacques.

"Almost full," was the reply.

"I'd like to be out with you and see it. It's pretty stuffy in here."

"Why don't you come out then?" exclaimed Jacques teasingly. "I am not stopping you, I'm sure."

"Don't be funny, Jacques. It is bad enough being in here, without your teasing me about it. How much hay is there on top of me anyway?"

"Oh, about a foot and a half or two feet," answered Jacques.

"Then I could easily get out. If I just stood up I could lift the cage and all right up on my shoulders."

"Don't try it now, please," exclaimed Jacques. "I guess you could do as you say, but I'll take your word for it."

"Don't tease me then," threatened Leon, pretending to be angry.

"All right, I won't any more. We are coming to a town now, I think, so we'd better not talk for a while."

They lapsed into silence. Jacques, dressed in girl's clothing, made a strange picture as he drove into the little French town. Only a few people were on the one narrow street, and when they saw a girl driving the hay-load they paid scant attention to her. Germans seemed to be the only objects of interest in that part of the country, just then, and nothing else mattered.

Perhaps if Leon had suddenly jumped to his feet and appeared in the middle of the hay-load the sight would have created as much consternation as the Germans. Leon, however, had no such thought, for he was sound asleep. Curled up in his little cage he slept on in spite of the rumble of the cart and the squeaking of its wheels.

After passing through the village, Jacques had addressed several remarks to his friend, but receiving no response he decided that he must be asleep and so he tried no more. The horse traveled slowly and more than once the young Frenchman dozed off and so caught a few winks of sleep himself.

"What time is it?"

Leon was at last awake, and stiff and cramped as well.

"I don't know," replied Jacques, "but it is getting light."

"Whew," exclaimed Leon. "I've been asleep a long time. Have you had any excitement?"

"Not a bit, but I think I see some now," said Jacques sharply. "Don't say another word unless I tell you to."

CHAPTER VI

AN ENCOUNTER WITH THE UHLANS

FAR down the road ahead of them Jacques saw horses, ridden by men who were wearing German helmets. They were approaching and there appeared to be about ten in the force.

A band of raiding Uhlans, he said to himself, and soon he would know whether his disguise was effective or not. He was decidedly nervous about the test he was about to undergo, and he hoped that his voice would not betray him.

However, if Jacques felt nervous, what could be said of the young American inside the load of hay? He had no idea of the nature of the excitement which his friend had said was coming; he could not see anything and the best he could do was to guess at what was in store for him and his young French comrade. Leon spent a few very uneasy moments.

Presently he heard the clatter of hoofs, and then a loud command in German as the horses came to a stop alongside the wagon. He knew something critical was about to happen and he

felt for his revolver as he crouched in the darkness of his hiding place.

Outside he could hear words in German and then occasionally Jacques would answer in French. If he could only see what was happening! He was nervous and only his great confidence in his friend's quick wit prevented him from springing to his feet and disclosing himself.

He knew Jacques was possessed of cool judgment and good nerve, however, and he decided that the only thing for him to do was to trust to him. Hours seemed to pass as he awaited the result of the conference, but in reality only a few moments elapsed.

At length to his great relief he heard a command given and the Germans galloped off down the road. Still Leon did not dare to speak for he had no way of knowing whether all the Uhlans had left or not.

"They've gone," exclaimed Jacques a moment later.

"All of them?"

"Yes. There were ten of them in all."

"What did they want?"

"How do I know? I don't understand German and evidently they don't understand French."

"What did they do?" insisted Leon. "I want to know what happened."

"They just stood and talked and looked at me.

I think they had some discussion as to whether they should let me go or not. Anyway, that's the way it seemed to me, and for a while I thought they were going to make me go along with them."

"You are sure they are all gone now?"

"Positively, and it seems to me we ought to stop somewhere soon. We have been traveling all night, you know, and our horse ought to have a rest. We want something to eat, too."

"Is it light outside now?" asked Leon.

"Light as day."

"Let's stop then; I'm tired of living in here like a mole. I tell you it's nervous work, too, when any Germans come along. When they were talking to you there a few minutes ago, I can tell you I was anxious."

"I'll see if I can discover a good place for us to stop," said Jacques.

"Aren't there any woods near-by?"

"Yes, there are some just ahead. Perhaps there is a peasant's house in them somewhere and we can put up there for the day."

"What can we feed the horse?" exclaimed Leon suddenly.

Jacques laughed heartily.

"Are you fooling?" he asked.

"Certainly not," replied Leon hotly. "What are you laughing at?"

"I hope you are not serious just the same.

But if you are, I'd like to ask you one question. What is it we have on this wagon?"

"Hay, of course."

"You are right. What do horses eat?"

It was now Leon's turn to laugh.

"This darkness and close air must have affected my brain," he said. "I never heard of anything so silly as my asking what the horse would eat. Did you ever have a brain storm like that?"

"Oh, yes," replied Jacques cheerfully. "Perhaps you are feeling the effects of your cramped position in there. I'll get you out very soon."

"It can't be any too soon for me," exclaimed Leon heartily.

As he spoke Jacques heard hoof beats behind him and turning around he spied two horsemen approaching. They were Germans and evidently part of the detachment that had stopped him a short time previously.

"Quiet, Leon! Quiet!" he cautioned. "Here come two Uhlans."

Jacques, after the first quick glance he cast over his shoulder, paid no more attention to the approaching horsemen. He kept his eyes straight ahead and endeavored to compose himself as much as possible. At any rate he did not know whether or not it was on his account that the Germans were returning and he determined that even though that should prove to be the case he would

show no signs of uneasiness if he could prevent it.

Louder and louder sounded the approaching hoof beats. The hearts of the two young soldiers also beat faster and faster, as they heard their enemies draw nearer and nearer.

Both boys had a feeling that they were the objects of the Uhlans' return and they prepared themselves to meet whatever might happen. They were both determined to resist capture to the last and to go to any extremity to avoid this. Leon had his revolver grasped tightly in his right hand, while Jacques carefully removed his from his blouse and placed it in the hay beside him.

The two Germans were almost upon them now and Jacques steeled himself for the encounter. A moment later they were alongside the wagon and then in front of it. Perhaps they were going past after all, thought Jacques.

This was not to be the case, however. Just as the young Frenchman had almost persuaded himself that the danger was gone the Germans suddenly drew rein and wheeled their horses. One on each side of the road they stood, effectually blocking any chance of passage.

Jacques looked at them as unconcernedly as possible and tried his best to hide his feelings. The horsemen held up their hands and Jacques stopped the wagon.

"Where are you going?" asked one of the Uhlans in French.

Evidently the first detachment that had stopped the boys had met with one of their comrades who could speak French. He had been sent back to question the girl on the load of hay.

"To my uncle's, down the road," replied Jacques somewhat taken back at being addressed in his own language.

"To whom are you taking the hay?" continued the German.

"To my uncle, of course."

"What can he use it for?"

"Why, to feed his horses," exclaimed Jacques in mock surprise.

"That cannot be true," said his questioner. "We have just been all along this road and you may be sure we left no horses behind us."

"It must have been very recently," said Jacques, realizing that he was on dangerous ground and fighting for time to think of some way out of his peril.

"A week ago," said the man, looking narrowly at Jacques.

"At any rate I must see him," said the young Frenchman. "Will you let me pass, Monsieur?"

"You come with us," exclaimed the man gruffly, suddenly changing his manner.

"But why?"

"Because I tell you to. Come along, no fooling now."

"But why do you want me?" protested Jacques. "What possible service can I, a poor French peasant girl, do you?"

"I said for you to come with us!" said the Uhlan sharply. "If you won't come of your own accord, we'll make you."

"I don't see why I should," continued Jacques quietly.

"You're coming just the same," cried the German angrily, and he reached forward to grasp the bridle of the horse Jacques was driving.

As he did so Jacques suddenly sprang to his feet, revolver in hand.

"Quick, Leon! Quick!" he shouted. "I need help."

CHAPTER VII

A SURPRISE

LEON was not slow to respond to the summons. For some time he had been crouching in readiness for just such a call. Consequently the moment he heard his name spoken he acted. Grasping the wire cage which covered him, he lifted with all his strength and hurled it high into the air. Revolver in hand he scrambled out of his cubby-hole as fast as he possibly could.

As he did so he heard several pistol shots in quick succession.

The Uhlans had been completely taken by surprise at the sudden change in the actions of the supposed French girl. Seeing her abruptly spring to her feet and call out in deep, mannish tones for some one they could not see was bad enough. And then suddenly to see the whole top of the hay-load fly into the air, however, was something that seemed completely to daze them. The cavalrymen sat on their horses as if they were too stunned to move.

Jacques had relied upon this lack of quick action on their part and had fired several shots into the

air in order further to increase the astonishment of the Germans. At the same time he called upon both of them to surrender.

The light somewhat dazzled Leon's eyes when he emerged from his hiding place, but the first objects he saw when he became somewhat accustomed to it were two huge Uhlans seated on two splendid horses. Both men were holding their hands high above their heads in token of their surrender.

"Take their weapons away from them, Leon," ordered Jacques.

"I certainly will," exclaimed Leon delightedly.

He quickly leaped down to the ground and approached their prisoners.

"Keep them covered, Jacques," he warned.

"Don't worry about that. I feel sorry for the one that moves first."

It was but a moment's work to disarm the two men, and when this task was completed, Jacques ordered the Uhlans to dismount.

This they did and while Leon stood guard over them Jacques took off his dress. He quickly tore it into strips and soon the two Germans, who still seemed to be somewhat dazed, were securely bound hand and foot and laid by the roadside.

"Now we'd better leave," exclaimed Jacques.

"Yes, and quickly, too."

"Shall we take their horses?"

"Why not?"

"What shall we do with ours?"

"Leave him here. He can't be of any possible use to us."

"Very well," agreed Jacques, "but I want to do one thing for him. He brought us quite a long distance last night and should be rewarded."

He quickly cut the traces and let their faithful old horse out of the shafts. He took the bit out of the animal's mouth and led him around to the rear of the wagon. The horse immediately began contentedly to munch the hay. There Jacques left him.

"That's the way, Jacques!" said Leon approvingly. "Now let's get on our new mounts and leave this section as fast as we can go."

The boys, both of whom were expert horsemen, and had proved their ability not long before in Belgium,* were soon in the saddle.

"Why not dress up in these men's uniforms?" exclaimed Leon.

"Yes, and be shot for a couple of spies," grunted Jacques. "Not for me. I prefer personally to take my chances in a French uniform."

"You're right, as usual," agreed Leon. "Come on."

Setting spurs to their horses they sped off down the road.

*See "The Air Scout."

"That was the easiest thing I ever saw," said Leon a few moments later. "You certainly worked that trick in great style, Jacques."

"It was your sudden appearance that finished them, I think," said Jacques. "You should have seen the look on their faces when the cage and the hay shot up into the air. They were stunned absolutely."

"It's a good thing they were, for I couldn't see a thing when the light first struck my eyes."

"I guess they thought there was a noiseless bomb or something like that inside the hay," said Jacques; and both boys laughed delightedly at the recollection.

"You'd jump too, if you suddenly saw the top fly off a hay-load, wouldn't you?" demanded Leon.

"I know I would," laughed Jacques.

"Well, then, I guess we ought not to blame those Uhlans. At the same time I'm glad there was no fight."

"So am I. I think we'll have plenty of fighting later and there is no use in looking for trouble before it can be seen."

"That's right. By the way, when are we going to stop and have a little food?" added Leon.

"I was thinking of that very thing," said Jacques. "Let's stop now."

"Where?"

"Turn in here to the right. We ought to find a place near-by."

The two boys were riding through a long stretch of woods. A narrow path ran at right angles with the main road and this path the two young soldiers chose to follow. It wound in and out under the great trees in the forest and was evidently but little used.

A mile or so the two boys rode into the woods, still following the pathway.

"Isn't this far enough?" demanded Leon.

"I was hoping we'd find a stream of some kind," said Jacques. "We could give our horses a drink then, and have one ourselves."

"All right," agreed Leon, "that sounds like a good idea."

"You have the food with you, haven't you?"

"I have what the peasant woman gave us."

"That's what I mean. Pretty soon we'll have to be foraging for ourselves and I don't think there is very much food to be had in this part of the country."

"Oh, we'll manage somehow," exclaimed Leon cheerfully.

"You Americans always have lots of confidence, anyway," said Jacques laughingly.

"Well, it's a good thing to have, isn't it?"

"It certainly is," agreed Jacques.

"There's a brook ahead," Leon exclaimed suddenly.

A moment later the two young horsemen came to the bank of a small brook which made its way through the center of the forest.

"Let's follow it for a mile or so to the south," said Jacques.

"Is that the direction in which we want to go?"

"Yes, and I think we'd better get some distance away from this path. So far, we haven't met any one, but you never can tell."

"It's impossible to be too careful to suit me," agreed Leon, as they turned the heads of their horses from the path and started to follow the winding bed of the brook.

For some time they proceeded in silence, Jacques leading the way. The horses they had captured were magnificent animals but they had been ridden hard and far and were in need of rest. The boys too were very tired after their tedious ride in the hay cart, and they had eaten nothing since the preceding evening.

Presently they came to a little ravine, surrounded on all sides by steep cliffs and huge rocks. A small clump of trees was situated in the center of the hollow and here it was the boys decided to make their camp.

Jacques had filled a bag with hay before they

left their wagon, and this he gave to the horses after allowing them to drink at the brook. The two boys also drank deeply of the cool, clear water and then at once set about preparing their meal.

"What have we to eat?" inquired Jacques.

"Some hard biscuits, two loaves of bread and some bacon."

"That's better than nothing, anyway."

"Of course it is. I call that a very good meal," laughed Leon. "We can have some hot bacon at any rate."

"How are you going to cook it? We have nothing to put it in."

"Give me a match and I'll soon show you."

"I don't know whether I have any matches or not."

"Oh, Jacques, you must have," exclaimed Leon in alarm. "Every good soldier always carries matches."

"Have you any?" demanded Jacques as he fumbled through his pockets.

"No, but I'm not a good soldier, I admit."

"Well, I have two, and don't waste them whatever you do."

"You tie the horses while I build the fire," said Leon as he began the task of gathering firewood.

Jacques had been holding the two horses by their bridles all this time, while they munched the

hay on the ground at their feet. Now he led them about fifty feet away and proceeded to fasten them to the low hanging branch of a near-by tree. Then he gathered up the remnants of the hay and carried it to the hungry animals.

When he returned to his comrade, there was a bright fire burning. Leon was sharpening sticks with which he speared fat chunks of bacon and held them over the fire to roast.

"That's the finest smell I have ever encountered," exclaimed Jacques enthusiastically. "I didn't know I was so hungry."

"This will taste all right," said Leon, "even if it doesn't look so very good."

"Cut some slices of that bread, Jacques," he added. "We'll have roast bacon sandwiches."

This was quickly done and soon the two young soldiers were busily engaged in appeasing their keen appetites. So engaged in this occupation were they that they did not notice what was going on about them. They had entirely forgotten that they might be in danger.

They speedily were recalled to the possibility, however, when they heard the rush of feet behind them and felt strong hands grasp them tightly around their necks and hold their arms fast.

CHAPTER VIII

NEW FRIENDS

THE two boys were so completely taken by surprise at this sudden onslaught that they were powerless to resist. Before they had time to realize what was happening they found themselves bound hand and foot. Struggle as they might, they could not loosen their bonds in the slightest degree.

The first thought to flash through the boys' minds had been that their assailants were Germans; probably some comrades of the Uhlans whose horses they had seized had tracked them to this spot.

Imagine their surprise at looking up into the faces of five or six great rough looking, bearded men, who certainly were not Germans, and who resembled no Frenchmen that Leon, at least, had ever seen. He wondered if they were robbers or desperadoes of some sort, who were hiding in this forest to escape the law.

They were certainly as wild appearing individuals as he had ever beheld. Ragged and unkempt, and all large and powerfully built, they did not

present a very pleasant appearance, whoever they might be.

The captors of the young soldiers stood over them, talking rapidly in a language that to Leon seemed a strange gibberish, which possibly might be a dialect of the French. He trusted so, at any rate.

Jacques straightway began to talk. The men looked at him for a moment in surprise and then quickly loosed him from his bonds. Leon was soon released also and the boys arose to their feet, once more free. At least they were no longer tied.

"What is happening?" asked Leon of his friend.

Jacques, however, paid no attention to his comrade, but kept busily talking to the strange looking men.

They must be French, thought Leon, or they could not understand what his comrade was saying. Certainly Jacques was using that language. The men stood around him gesticulating and talking rapidly. They pointed to the horses and then they pointed to Leon, evidently questioning Jacques in regard to them.

They laughed at Jacques' replies and as far as Leon could understand appeared to be apologizing. At length the strange conversation ceased and Jacques turned to his companion.

"Well," said Leon, "who are your friends?"

"Wood cutters," replied Jacques. "They are on our side all right, but they mistook us for Germans at first."

"I hope they won't treat their other friends the way they did us," remarked Leon, as he spoke, ruefully rubbing his neck where he could still feel the effect of the strong grip with which he had been seized.

"Yes," continued Jacques, "they saw the saddles on our horses and thought of course we were Uhlans. Then they decided to fix us so that we could do no harm."

"I thought they were robbers, or outlaws, or something like that," said Leon. "I have never seen any French wood cutters before."

"They're not very handsome, I admit, but they are good people."

"They kept us from our breakfast," protested Leon. "At this time that is about the worst thing any man could do to me."

"Never mind," said Jacques laughingly, "they have invited us to breakfast with them."

"Good!" exclaimed Leon. "Let's start at once."

The two young soldiers quickly secured their horses and a moment later were following their newly found friends over the rough ground to the place where the wood cutters lived.

It was a strange procession. The six great grizzled peasants led the way in single file, while close behind them came the two boys, each leading his horse. Up a narrow trail out of the ravine they passed, and presently once more found themselves in the deep woods.

"What were these men laughing at when you were talking to them?" asked Leon of his friend.

"I was telling them about the load of hay and how surprised the Germans were when you suddenly burst out."

"They liked that, did they?"

"I should say they did. They all exclaimed that they wished they had been there to help us make prisoners of our victims, as well as to bring away their horses."

"Well, I think a body guard of a few men like these would be a very nice thing," laughed Leon. "What do you say to our bringing them along?"

"It would suit us better than it would them, I imagine. They are a strange lot of men and usually very ignorant."

"Have they seen any Germans lately?"

"I don't know. I didn't ask and they said nothing about it. They did say though that they saw large bodies of troops pass to the south some days ago."

"French or German?"

"Both. First went the French and a few English with them. Then came the Germans. Thousands and thousands of them the man said; thicker than the leaves on a tree."

"That won't help us to reach our regiment any sooner than we expected, will it?" exclaimed Leon somewhat dolefully.

"No, but I think we can do it. Don't worry just now, anyway; here we are at our destination and I'm ready to eat."

"We didn't leave our bacon back there in the ravine, did we?" exclaimed Leon in sudden alarm.

"No, indeed. I brought along all the food that we hadn't eaten, and you know what little chance we had to do that."

"I surely do. Let's hope for better luck here."

Several rude huts were situated in a clearing in the forest and here it was that the wood cutters lived. Hewn from rough logs, with the cracks stuffed with sod, the little houses did not present a very attractive appearance. At the doors of one or two there appeared women and a little group of children. Unkempt and ill fed curs ran out to bark at the newcomers.

"What a way to live," exclaimed Leon.

"It is pretty bad, isn't it?" said Jacques. "These people are pitifully poor and I should say that they existed rather than lived."

"Everything looks dirty, too," said Leon. "I wonder if we can eat their food."

"I can eat nails, I believe," exclaimed Jacques. "Never do I remember having been so hungry."

"We want sleep too, you know."

"We'll get that here, all right."

The boys tied their horses in a low shed nearby and a few moments later were busily engaged in eating. A broth made from vegetables and stewed rabbit was set before them and the two young soldiers lost no time in testing its qualities.

"I don't know what this stuff is," said Leon after his first few tastes, "but I do know that it's mighty good."

"It's rabbit stew."

"Where did the rabbit come from?"

"How do I know?" inquired Jacques, amused at the many questions his American comrade kept asking. "I guess they poached it."

"You mean these men are poachers?"

"Probably."

"Well, it doesn't bother me any, I can tell you that," said Leon as he applied himself more industriously than before to his task.

"Nor me."

Jacques turned to the woman who had brought them the stew and told her how much they liked it. She smiled delightedly, as did also the men who were standing nearby watching the boys ap-

pease their hunger. Simple folk, they seemed, but hospitable and anxious to be of service.

At last the food was gone. Sleep was the next thing that suggested itself to the boys and they were invited to occupy two bunks in one of the huts. This invitation they gratefully accepted and decided to retire shortly.

"We must find out soon what we are going to do," said Jacques.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean what route we are going to take on our way south."

"Don't you know the way?" exclaimed Leon. "I thought you knew all about it."

"Not at all. I have a general idea of the country, but not good enough to tell all the little places we must go through, or which is the best route to follow."

"How can we map out a route anyway?" demanded Leon. "We don't know where our regiment is and even if we did know, what good would it do us? Just because they are in one place now, doesn't mean they'll still be there next week."

"That's true enough. What do you suggest?"

"I haven't thought much about it, to tell you the truth. I have been following you blindly."

"Well, I have a plan," said Jacques. "Tell me what you think of it. You know that the Ger-

mans are sending separate armies into France, don't you?"

"You mean they are invading from different points at the same time?"

"Exactly. That is the way I understand it, at any rate. My idea is to follow the route of their most westerly army; that is the division our regiment was pitted against, I believe."

"Either that or the one next to it," agreed Leon. "What is the idea in following the German western army though? Wouldn't it be shorter to head straight for Paris from here?"

"It is shorter, but harder, I think. You see, if we follow the German right wing, we will have enemies on only one side of us, while if we start straight from here, we will have them on all sides."

"Quite right, and I guess your plan is the best one after all."

"Very well, then. Let's get some rest now and when evening comes we'll start out again. Probably one of these men will guide us part way on our journey. At least he can put us on the right track."

"All right," said Leon. "That sounds like a good scheme. The first part of it is satisfactory anyway."

The two boys arose and following one of the wood cutters entered the low door of one of the

near-by huts. A wide bunk at one end of the rude house was offered them and they lost no time in climbing in. Scarcely had their heads touched the pillow before they were sound asleep.

CHAPTER IX

A RIDE IN THE NIGHT

WHEN Leon awoke it was already growing dark and inside the hut it was almost impossible to distinguish objects clearly. At first he had no idea where he was and he sprang to his feet with a start. Then he suddenly remembered the happenings that had brought him to the wood cutters' home and he looked about him for his comrade.

Jacques, however, was nowhere to be seen.

He was not inside the hut, as Leon soon discovered. This fact caused the young American no little worry, as in times like the present it was never a certainty that any one was safe.

Leon hastened to the door determined to find his friend. As he emerged from the house he spied Jacques approaching with one of the peasants. The young American heaved a sigh of relief at his discovery.

"Hey, there, Jacques!" he called. "I thought you were lost."

"Not at all," laughed Jacques, coming up to the place where Leon was standing. "I woke up

about a half an hour ago and I thought I would scout around a little. This man is going to guide us out of the woods."

"Good for him! When do we start?"

"As soon as we have had something to eat. I was just coming to wake you up. When I climbed out of that bunk you were snoring so loud I thought at first one of those German forty-two centimeter howitzers was bombarding us."

"Is that so?" laughed Leon. "Perhaps if the Germans hear me they'll think it's the French artillery and run away from us."

"Well, anyway," said Jacques, "I have found a guide. These people insist that we must eat dinner before we start out and this man has offered to show us the way."

"They're mighty good. How about our horses?"

"They have been watered, fed and rubbed down. We are ready to start at any time now."

"That is wonderful," exclaimed Leon. "Let's eat our meal and be off."

They were soon busily engaged in disposing of another simple, but hearty, meal, and as they ate they discussed their plans.

"We want to reach Douai next," said Jacques. "That is the nearest place of any size and is on the route followed by the German right wing, I think."

"We don't want to go into the city itself, do we?"

"Oh, I think not, but I mean that is the general direction we want to follow."

"All right," said Leon, "and then where do we go from Douai?"

"We go to Vitry and then to Arras. Then down through Albert and Amiens; then on to Paris."

"Sounds easy enough," said Leon. "How far is it from here?"

"About a hundred miles or so, I should say."

"That's quite a fair walk."

"I know it is, but we'll get there. Anyway we have horses."

"Yes, we have horses now," agreed Leon. "To-morrow we may not though."

"Well, you know that song the English soldiers were singing up around Mons, don't you? 'It's a long way to Tipperary, but my heart's right there.' It's a long way to Paris, too, but our hearts are right there, and we'll be there too, before very long."

"I hope so. Perhaps we won't have to go all the way to Paris anyway."

"That's so," agreed Jacques. "Anyway let's make a start for it. Just think what General Joffre will say when he hears we have forced our way from Belgium to Paris through the whole

German army. He'll probably give us the Legion of Honor."

"Wake up, Jacques. You're still asleep," exclaimed Leon laughingly. "Where are our horses? We ought to be on our way."

A moment later the boys were seated in their saddles ready to depart. Their guide was on foot and was to lead the way through the forest, while the two young soldiers followed slowly behind him. The wood cutters crowded about them and wished them the best of luck. Jacques thanked them all, in behalf of himself and Leon, for their hospitality and then they started off.

Both boys were in fine fettle and felt ready for almost anything. Two hearty meals and a long sleep had put fresh life into them and they were both in high spirits.

"It's awfully dark in these woods," exclaimed Leon, after they had covered a quarter of a mile or more.

"It certainly is. What do you suppose we would have done without a guide?"

"I've no idea. We'd have had to let our horses go wherever they wanted to, I guess. I'm sure I'd hate to try to find my way through here."

"I'm letting my horse find his own path now," said Jacques. "I hope he can see the way, for I know I can't. He is following our guide all right."

"It's a good thing we have these horses, isn't it?" chuckled Leon. "Just think of having to walk all this distance."

"An automobile is better than a horse."

"All right, then. Let's get an automobile."

"Where shall we find one?" inquired Jacques, much amused at his friend's enthusiasm.

"How do I know?" retorted Leon. "Where did we find these horses?"

"On the road, of course."

"Well, then, that's the place to look for an automobile."

"You talk as though it was easy," laughed Jacques. "Do you think we are going to find one sitting by the roadside waiting for us?"

"You never can tell," persisted Leon. "We might run across one."

"Do you think we could run it?"

"Well, if you can't, you ought to be ashamed of yourself," exclaimed Leon. "Any man who is an aviator in the French army and can't run a motor car ought to be made to walk to Paris."

A weird cry suddenly sounded far off to their right, causing both horses to start nervously, and forcing the boys to give all their attention to their mounts.

Again the cry was heard, this time apparently closer at hand and greater in volume.

"What is that?" exclaimed Leon nervously, as

he tried to quiet his horse, which was shaking with fear.

"Wolves, I think," replied Jacques. He spoke a few words to their guide in his native tongue. "Yes," he continued, "that is a pack of wolves. Our guide says so."

"They won't attack us, will they?" said Leon.

"I don't think so. I knew that there were wolves in these forests, but I don't think they'll bother us. In winter, however, they grow very bold sometimes, especially when they roam in packs."

Once more the mournful and blood-curdling howl of the wolf broke the silence of the night. The two horses were exceedingly nervous and it was with difficulty that the boys restrained them from breaking into a run.

"There are several of them, I think," suggested Leon in a low voice.

"Perhaps so," replied Jacques, "but we'll soon be out of the woods and I think there is but slight danger from wolves at this time of year. It is only in the winter, when they are made desperate by hunger, that they are bold enough to come where men are."

The cry resounded through the forest several times more, but each time it seemed to be more distant and before long faded away entirely. The horses soon became quiet and the journey was

resumed in peace. In a short time they reached the edge of the woods as Jacques had predicted, and their guide prepared to turn back.

The boys thanked him for his kindness, and for the food which he had presented them. This supply Jacques now was carrying in a pack on his back.

A long white road stretched before them and when their guide had indicated the direction to be taken, he waved good-by to the boys and entering the woods once more, disappeared from sight.

"Well, here we are," exclaimed Jacques at length.

"Yes, and I can't say I am as fond of the open road as I am of the woods," replied Leon. "There are too many people on a highway like this and the risk is much greater."

"That's true enough, but at the same time you must remember that we can make much better time here. I don't know how we can avoid the risk."

"Neither do I. We'll have to be more careful, that's all."

Setting spurs to their horses they started off down the road at a brisk canter. The night was very dark and very still, and to the two young soldiers it seemed as if the hoof beats of their mounts must be heard for a long distance around. They realized that they were in danger, for there

are bodies of stragglers behind every army, especially one traveling as fast as the Germans'. One of the wood cutters had told Jacques that he understood they covered between twenty and thirty miles a day.

This man had hidden in the woods as the German masses surged past. Often he said he had seen some of the men in the ranks, too exhausted to keep pace with the others, urged on by the swords of their officers. There was no time to sympathize with weaklings and every man must keep going, whether he felt like it or not.

"The German army is certainly a wonderful machine, isn't it?" Leon exclaimed suddenly as he recalled what he had heard and seen of it.

"It surely is," replied his companion, "and I hope that no part of that machine is lurking around here."

"We are helpless, if they are," said Leon. "Any one could hear us coming a quarter of a mile down the road and just sit and wait for us. I don't like this horseback riding, down the main highway at night, with the thought always in your mind that at any second some German may be sitting by the roadside aiming a gun at your head."

"What can we do?" protested Jacques.

"I don't know, I'm sure. We'll have to chance it, I guess."

"We can't ride across country very well, and I

hate to give up our horses, for we certainly make much better time this way than on foot."

"If we only had an automobile," sighed Leon.

"What good would that do us? We'd still be on the road just the same."

"Think of the speed we could make," Leon insisted. "We could run away from any one who chased us."

"That depends on the kind of car we had," laughed Jacques. "I must say I've seen some machines that couldn't run away from anything."

"Oh, but we'd pick a good one, of course."

"I hear one now," exclaimed Jacques suddenly.

Both boys reined in their horses and listened. Sure enough, far down the road ahead of them they could hear the whirr of a motor as it sped over the country. Its searchlight flashed against the sky for a moment as it climbed a low hill.

"Quick, Leon, get off the road," urged Jacques.

"Let's stop them," said Leon eagerly, not moving an inch.

"Don't be a fool!" cried Jacques, as he spurred his horse ahead and hastily made his way to the cover of some near-by trees.

Left alone, there was no choice for Leon but to follow. A moment later the automobile sped by with a rush and roar. As far as he could discover from the one quick glance afforded him,

Leon thought there were only two men in the car. They were evidently in great haste.

"You see how easy it would be," he explained to Jacques, as they started down the road again. "All we'd have to do would be to stand in the middle of the road and point our revolvers at them. They'd see us in the glare of the lights and would stop quickly enough. Will you try it?"

"I don't know," replied Jacques cautiously. "It seems a risky sort of business to me."

"Oh, come on," Leon urged. "We can do it easily. Will you try it on the next one that comes along? I'll guarantee it'll be all right."

"Here comes one now," he suddenly exclaimed. "Are you with me, Jacques? I can't do it alone, you know."

"All right," cried Jacques, quickly dismounting as he spoke.

With a sharp slap on the side the two faithful horses were sent speeding down the road. Then drawing their revolvers the boys took their places directly in the pathway of the approaching automobile.

CHAPTER X

A NEW CONVEYANCE

"IF we keep our nerve, we're all right," exclaimed Leon, as the huge car thundered down upon them.

"Don't worry about our losing that," replied Jacques grimly.

Nearer and nearer came the automobile. It was moving at the rate of at least fifty miles an hour and for a moment it seemed to the two young soldiers in the middle of the road that it was not going to stop.

Suddenly the roar of the motor ceased; the brakes screamed and whined and the car came to a full stop not ten feet away from them. The engine still ran smoothly and evenly, however.

"Quick, Jacques, run up to the car and disarm the people. I think there is only one man in it, though. I'll keep him covered."

Jacques sprang forward at once, still keeping his gun gripped firmly in his right hand. Sure enough, as Leon had said, there was but one man in the machine and he was the chauffeur.

Calling upon him to surrender, Jacques sprang upon the running board and pressed his revolver close to the surprised man's ear.

"Come on, Leon!" he called. "There is only one person here."

"What did I tell you?" cried Leon gleefully. "I said we might as well have an automobile as a couple of horses and here it is already."

He jumped into the tonneau of the car as he spoke.

"The man's a German, isn't he?" he inquired of Jacques.

"Certainly. Don't you see his helmet?"

Their captive sat silent in his seat, calmly looking from one to the other of the young soldiers.

"Take his gun away from him, Leon," cried Jacques. "I'll stand here and keep this revolver pointed at his head. I guess that'll keep him quiet."

Leaning over the back of the seat Leon quickly deprived their victim of whatever means of defense he had.

"All right, Jacques," he said. "Now what shall we do with him?"

"Put him out of the car."

"Get out," shouted Leon in the man's ear.

He did not move.

"He can't understand you, Leon," Jacques reminded. "Make motions."

"Get out," repeated Leon, waving his arms violently as he spoke.

This method of communication instantly had the desired effect and the German rose to his feet. As he did so he leaned forward and with a quick motion did something to the mechanism of the car. The motor began to slow down and presently stopped entirely.

"Stop that!" cried Leon angrily, but it was too late to prevent the man from accomplishing his purpose.

"Don't worry," exclaimed Jacques. "I know what he did."

As the German, grinning maliciously, stepped from the car, Jacques motioned for him to go in front of the headlights. Following closely behind him and constantly flourishing his revolver, the young Frenchman made his captive hold up his hands.

"Now you keep him covered," he said to Leon. "I want to search him."

He quickly went through the German's pockets and presently uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Here it is," he exclaimed, very much relieved.

"What is it?" inquired Leon.

"It is what he took out of the car. We'd have been helpless without it."

"I asked you what it was," repeated Leon.

"The little plug that furnishes the spark necessary to start the motor."

"Well, I guess we do need that," exclaimed Leon grimly. "You are sure you can run the car, Jacques?"

"Positive."

"What make is it?"

"It's a Benz. I've often run one, and I know all about them."

"That's good," said Leon. "Let's get rid of our friend here and start on our way. Somebody will come along and take the car away from us if we aren't more careful."

"Right you are," agreed Jacques, "but what shall we do with this fellow?"

"Leave him where he is."

"We might take him along as a prisoner."

"What could we do with a prisoner when the German army is between us and our troops?" exclaimed Leon.

"I guess we couldn't do anything," replied Jacques. "We'll leave him here as you suggest."

"Come along, then. We are wasting valuable time."

A moment later the two young soldiers were in the front seat of the automobile. Jacques had started the motor and was at the wheel. The German who had previously owned the machine stood in the glare of the searchlights mournfully

watching his enemies preparing to make off with his car.

"Wait a minute, Jacques," exclaimed Leon suddenly.

"What's the matter?"

"Did you search him for papers of any kind?" Leon continued excitedly. "He might have his pockets full of valuable documents for all we know."

"Don't worry about that," returned Jacques. "When I was looking for the plug, you may be sure I looked for papers, too. He didn't have a thing."

"All right, then. Go ahead."

The car started slowly as Jacques let in the clutch, and they were soon turned around and headed in the opposite direction from that in which the car had come. The German stood by the roadside looking very dismal. Leon kept his glance fixed upon him, however, for he wished to take no chances. A punctured tire or some similar mishap would be very annoying just at this time.

The German made no move, however. He probably appreciated the fact that one unarmed man has no chance against two that possess guns. The huge Benz thundered off down the road leaving the German to his own devices.

"Perhaps he'll find our horses," remarked Leon.

"He's very welcome to mine, I'm sure," laughed Jacques.

"We ought to have told him about them. That was the least we could have done for him."

"How could we tell him?" exclaimed Jacques. "Neither one of us could speak German, and he couldn't speak French or English."

"That's so. Anyway, I am satisfied with our trade."

"This is a wonderful car, all right," remarked Jacques.

"I wish my brother Earl could see me now," sighed Leon. "He'd almost die of envy, I think. Suppose he should suddenly appear here all at once."

"Where was he when you last heard of him?"

"In England. That doesn't mean he is still there, though. Personally I think he has started out to look for me. I wrote him that I had enlisted, you know, but even if he never received my letter, I'm sure he'd expect me to do that."

"He also may have enlisted."

"Quite true. I shouldn't be a bit surprised."

"If he has enlisted I don't believe he is riding around in as fine automobiles as you are," chuckled Jacques.

"I guess not."

"How about gasoline?" exclaimed Leon suddenly.

"I never looked," said Jacques. "We'd better do it, too."

"We'll never get any more, that's sure. What's the use of looking? All we can do is to run until this gives out and then we'll have to abandon the car. Won't that be a shame?"

"We may not be forced to it, however."

"What do you mean?" Leon exclaimed.

"How did we get this automobile?"

"We took it away from that German."

"Can't we get gasoline the same way?"

"You mean hold up another car and drain the tank?"

"Why not?" said Jacques calmly. "I see no reason why we can't do that, and as you say, it would be a shame to abandon this beautiful machine just for the lack of a few gallons of gasoline."

"You're all right, Jacques," exclaimed Leon gleefully.

"Say," he added, "isn't this a lark?"

"So far it is," agreed Jacques, "but things can't go on like this forever, you know. I've just been thinking about that and I'm afraid we are due for an awful bump soon. Everything has been too easy."

"We have been lucky, haven't we?" said Leon. "Still," he added, "you can't call it all luck by any means. We have taken chances and won out. That isn't luck."

"I don't care if it is," exclaimed Jacques, "if it only keeps up."

The two boys lapsed into silence, as they sped over the highway. Mile after mile they covered, the powerful car seemingly ignoring all the difficulties as well as the distances. Now and again they approached small towns and after their first experience they usually avoided them by a detour. The first town they had come to, however, they had sped right on through.

As they thundered along the single street that composed the little settlement they had been greeted by a half dozen bullets fired at them from behind. Consequently they took no more such risks.

Not another car had they met, and they both often wondered what they should do if such an emergency should arise. Perhaps they were lucky, as Jacques had said.

"There's a big city ahead of us," exclaimed Leon suddenly.

"Yes, that must be Douai," replied his friend. "We had better take the next road to the left and not attempt to go near the city."

As they turned from the main road a few mo-

ments later, the first streaks of light were beginning to appear in the east. Soon it would be day and a bad time for two soldiers of the army of France to be on the road in that part of the country.

"Hadn't we better stop soon?" said Leon presently.

"I was thinking that very thing," replied Jacques. "I had thought we should keep on until we came to some heavy woods. We could run the car in there and hide for the day. Also we might keep a lookout for some passing automobile, for we'll need gasoline soon."

"Can you run the car into the woods, though?"

"This car will go anywhere," exclaimed Jacques. "I'll guarantee to take it into any woods you select, if there is only room enough between the trees."

"All right," agreed Leon. "You're the driver."

Before they had covered many more miles the day had broken and everything about them was flooded with the beams of the early morning sun. Still they had found no satisfactory shelter, and they were becoming somewhat worried.

"I think I see some thick woods ahead," remarked Leon at length. "It's about time we were out of sight, too."

"These are all right," said Jacques, as a mo-

ment later they reached the spot Leon had indicated.

There was a strip of woods on both sides of the road. They were filled with large trees and considerable underbrush was to be seen, which promised an excellent refuge for the two young soldiers and their captured automobile. Just beyond the patch of woods was a large open field, evidently a part of a near-by farm.

Jacques ran the car slowly along, looking for a suitable place to turn in. He had found what he wanted when Leon suddenly grasped him by the arm.

"Stop the car, Jacques! Quick!" he exclaimed in a low voice, pointing directly in front of him as he spoke.

CHAPTER XI

A BOLD PLAN

JACQUES quickly followed his friend's suggestion and peered eagerly in the direction Leon indicated.

At first he saw nothing.

"What is it?" he exclaimed.

"Don't you see?" cried Leon. "Look there. Right through that break in the trees."

"I don't see anything," said Jacques. "Yes, I do, too," he added an instant later. "It's an aëroplane."

"It certainly is," exclaimed Leon, "and it's coming this way."

"Suppose it should land near here."

"I was just thinking of that," remarked Jacques; and the two boys looked at each other knowingly.

"Oh, Jacques, do you think we could?" said Leon excitedly.

"Could what?"

"Capture that aëroplane, of course. Isn't that what you were thinking?"

"Yes, that's what I was thinking, all right," replied Jacques, "but I don't know how we could capture it any more than you do."

"Well, let's put up the car and watch it anyway," exclaimed Leon eagerly.

Jacques quickly turned the big Benz into the woods at their right. Over the rough ground they went until they reached a dense thicket. Into this Jacques forced the automobile as far as it could go, and then the two boys quickly jumped to the ground. To cover the exposed part of the machine with loose boughs was the work of but a moment, and then they hastened at full speed back to the road again.

"Do you see it?" exclaimed Leon.

"No."

"Let's run down to the edge of that big field. We can see more of the sky there."

They set off down the road at full speed and soon came to the border of the woods. They did not go out into the open, however. Remaining under cover of the trees they skulked along the edge of the forest, keeping a sharp lookout in all directions for the missing aëroplane.

"Stop here," exclaimed Jacques at length.

The young soldiers crouched behind a dense clump of bushes which kept them out of the sight of any one in the field, but which did not shut off their view of the sky or of the country in any

way. Once settled there they eagerly resumed their search for the aëroplane.

It was nowhere to be seen, however.

"This seems sort of silly," said Leon after some moments had elapsed. "Here we are waiting for an aëroplane we happened to see flying overhead to come and land right at our feet. I guess we were too enthusiastic."

"It looks so, doesn't it? As you say, I don't see why we expected it to land, especially right where we are. What were we going to do if it did come down here?"

"I don't know, I'm sure," replied Leon. "Perhaps we thought the aviator would turn it over to us."

"Very likely," laughed Jacques. "The men in it probably knew that I was an aviator in the French army and could drive the machine. They also knew that you and I were stranded from our regiment and were anxious to get back. Consequently they decided to turn their aëroplane over to us in order to help us."

"It might have been a French machine," said Leon, smiling at his friend's remarks.

"It wasn't, though," said Jacques.

"How do you know?"

"I saw it. It was a German machine of the type they call a taube."

"Well, then, maybe you couldn't have run it anyway," remarked Leon.

"Don't be silly, Leon. Of course I could run it."

"You seem to have a lot of confidence in your ability," laughed Leon.

"Why not? I've been in this aviation business for some time now and in order to be a success I can tell you it is necessary to know all about machinery and motors. I'm not boasting when I say I could run that taube without any trouble."

"Well, it's gone, anyway," sighed Leon, rising to his feet as he spoke. "We might as well go back to our automobile."

Jacques also arose and the two young soldiers started to retrace their steps through the forest.

They had covered only a few yards when Jacques suddenly stopped.

"Listen," he exclaimed.

Both boys stood still. Over their heads and from high in the air came the whirring sound made by the propellers and motor of an aëroplane.

"They're coming back," cried Jacques excitedly. "Come on, Leon."

Quickly scrambling back to their place behind the bushes the two boys peered eagerly upward for a sight of their aërial visitor.

"There it is!" exclaimed Jacques in a low

voice, as he spoke, pointing to the sky directly about them.

"Yes, but they're not going to land, I'm afraid."

"It doesn't appear so, but you can't tell yet. They are about a thousand feet high, I should say."

"Look," cried Leon. "They're turning."

"Yes, sir, they are, and I wouldn't be a bit surprised now if they did land here after all."

The aëroplane, resembling a great buzzard in its flight, described a circle in the air high above the heads of the two eager watchers on the ground below. The shape of the taube certainly gave it the appearance of a bird and its flight seemed to be as steady and true as that of an eagle.

"They are circling around here, looking for a place to land," cried Jacques.

"Do you think so?"

"I'm practically sure of it."

"That's great," exclaimed Leon gleefully. "We may fly to Paris yet, Jacques."

"Don't be too sure," replied Jacques soberly. "They haven't even landed, and if they do, we'll have no easy task taking the machine away from them."

"Oh, we can do it," said Leon confidently. "You know we are lucky."

"So far, yes. This may be the time when our luck changes, though."

"I hope not. Anyway they're going to land, aren't they?" demanded Leon, watching the aëroplane intently.

"Yes. They've shut off their motor now, I think."

"I can't hear it," said Leon, listening intently. "We've got a great chance here, Jacques, and we mustn't make a botch of it."

Both boys unconsciously felt for their revolvers, at the same time keeping their gaze riveted on the descending aëroplane. Around and around in great circles it went, steadily coming closer and closer to the earth. Finally, with one straight, headlong dive, it shot downward and landed gracefully in the field not two hundred yards distant from the place where the boys were concealed.

It ran along the ground for some distance and then came to a full stop. Almost immediately two men got out.

"What shall we do now?" exclaimed Leon. "Rush them?"

"Wait and see what they do first," cautioned Jacques.

"But they may leave in a moment. We mustn't wait too long."

"Well, we can't charge them across this open

field very well. What chance do you think we'd have?"

"None," agreed Leon. "If we only had a rifle."

"But we haven't. Could you hit one of them at this distance with your revolver?"

"Not one chance in a thousand."

"Nor could I. Consequently we must wait for a short time and see if something doesn't happen to our advantage."

"What are they doing?" said Leon, puzzled by the actions of the two aviators.

"I should say they were preparing to eat breakfast."

"I guess you're right. See, they're taking things out of the aëroplane. Looks like a loaf of bread and a can or something."

The two Germans busied themselves in their task, and to all appearances were absolutely unconscious of any danger lurking near them. This fact struck both boys forcibly.

"They probably think that the whole Allied army has been driven almost to Paris," remarked Jacques, "and that there is no danger of any kind left in northern France."

"Well, they'll be fooled if they're not careful," said Leon grimly.

"Yes, and I hope we are the ones to do it."

"We'll never do it sitting here like this," exclaimed Leon impatiently.

"I know that, but what can we do?"

"Look!" cried Leon suddenly. "One of the men is coming over here."

Sure enough, one of the Germans had started to walk briskly in the direction of the hiding place of the boys. He hurried along as though he had some definite purpose in mind, and was eager to execute it.

"Do you suppose he has seen us?" whispered Leon.

"How could he?"

"What is he coming over here for, then?"

"I don't know, unless he is coming after some wood to make a fire."

"That must be it," exclaimed Leon. "What shall we do to him?"

"We can't shoot him, for the shot would alarm his companion and he might fly away. We must overpower him if we can and then go after the other."

"All right," agreed Leon, "but we want our guns handy, just the same."

The boys lapsed into silence. Crouching behind the thick bushes they watched the German approaching. Straight toward them he came, unconcerned and apparently not in the least worried. He even whistled a tune as he swung along.

As he came closer and closer the two young soldiers prepared themselves for the attack.

CHAPTER XII

AN AMBUSH

THE German was barely twenty yards distant now, and as yet he apparently suspected nothing. Ten yards away from the ambush prepared for him he stopped to light a cigarette he had selected from a case in his pocket.

The two young soldiers noticed this fact with satisfaction. Neither one of them had ever used tobacco and they knew that consequently they would be in better condition for the impending struggle than would their adversary.

Breathlessly they waited for the proper moment to strike. The German would evidently enter the woods about ten feet to the left of the place where the boys were hidden. From behind he would easily be able to see them and if he did so before they had a chance to overpower him, he might alarm his companion. It was necessary to time the attack for just the proper instant.

As he came even with their hiding place, Leon involuntarily started to rise to his feet. Jacques

gripped his friend firmly by the arm and held him back.

"Wait one moment," he whispered.

The German walked more slowly after he entered the forest. He began to look about him on the ground and was evidently in search of wood as Jacques had surmised. Leon was very impatient at being held back, but Jacques held him tightly, and as the young American could not argue at this time there was nothing left for him to do but submit to his comrade's plan, whatever it might be.

"Now, come," whispered Jacques fiercely, at the same time releasing his hold on Leon's arms.

Both boys rose to their feet at once and made a rush at their enemy, whose back was now turned to them. He was standing ten yards or more away, unmindful of any danger whatsoever.

At the sound of the cracking branches and leaves behind him he whirled suddenly, but too late to escape the onslaught. Both boys instantly leaped upon him. Jacques dealt him a crushing blow with the butt end of his revolver and at the same time Leon tackled him around the knees. Never in all his experience on the football field had he thrown an opponent quicker or harder than he did this aviator.

The German lay upon the ground partly stunned by the blow he had received from

Jacques' revolver. Wasting no time, the boys quickly removed their prisoner's coat and bound his arms firmly behind his back. Then, with his belt, they tied his feet securely together so that he was absolutely powerless to move.

"Carry him over here," exclaimed Jacques.

"Where are you going to put him?"

"Just over here behind this tree, where he'll be out of sight. His friend may be along in a few minutes."

They quickly lifted their prisoner and carried him to the spot Jacques had designated. As they put him down he opened his eyes dazedly. Up to this time he had been too stunned to resist, but now having regained full control of his senses he began to struggle violently.

The two boys stood over him with drawn revolvers fully prepared for any emergency, however.

"Do you think he can work himself loose?" said Leon.

"Not the slightest chance," replied Jacques confidently.

At the sound of voices their captive stopped struggling and looked up into the faces of the two boys.

"Who are you?" he inquired in excellent English.

It was a decided shock to the two young

soldiers to hear themselves addressed in this tongue.

"Shall we tell him?" said Jacques, turning to Leon.

"Why not? He is tied up safely and can do us no harm."

"All right, then," exclaimed Jacques, "we'll tell him if he wants to know."

"We're two soldiers of the French army," he continued, addressing the German at his feet. "We've been separated from our regiment and we are trying to find it again. We saw you land here in your aëroplane and we thought that if we borrowed it, it might help us to get along much faster."

The German laughed contemptuously.

"What could you do with an aëroplane?" he inquired.

"Why, the same thing you have been doing," replied Jacques calmly.

"You think you could run one then?" sneered their captive.

"Look here," broke in Leon hotly. "My friend here is an aviator in the French army, and if you don't think—"

"Don't bother to explain to him," laughed Jacques. "It's none of his business who we are, anyway. You stay here and watch this man while I go and keep an eye on his friend. It's

about time for him to begin a search for this inquisitive comrade of his."

"All right," agreed Leon. "I'll look out for him."

Jacques returned to his post at the edge of the woods, leaving Leon to deal with the captured aviator.

"Now suppose you tell me who you are," suggested Leon. "I am somewhat curious, too."

"What good would it do you to know that?"

"None at all," laughed Leon. "If you are ashamed, don't tell me."

"Look here," exclaimed the German hotly, "it seems to me you are a very confident young man. What are you doing in the French army, anyway? You don't look like a Frenchman."

"What good would it do you to know that?" mimicked Leon.

The German spluttered with rage, but he was helpless, and Leon enjoyed this show of temper on the part of the prisoner.

"You speak English very well," said Leon.

"I went to Oxford," exclaimed the captive, and then realizing that he had disclosed something about himself he suddenly became quiet. Try as he might Leon was unable to draw another word from his prisoner.

The German lay quietly on the ground and Leon soon became tired of merely looking at him.

What was the use in watching him further? He was securely tied and unable to rise to his feet. Certainly he could not escape. This was what Leon believed and he decided to stroll over to the place where Jacques was stationed. Accordingly he began to walk slowly in that direction.

Scarcely had he gone ten feet when the captive German began to yell at the top of his lungs. He shouted in his native tongue, but it was easy for Leon to believe that he was calling for help. He knew that if the other aviator became suspicious he might fly away, and their prize would be gone forever.

With two bounds he was back at the place where his prisoner was lying, and flinging himself headlong upon the German he clapped his hand over his mouth.

"If you make one more sound," he hissed in the man's ear, "I'll use this revolver on you and it won't be the butt end of it, either."

Quickly feeling in the pockets of the German's coat Leon found a scarf. With this he gagged his captive so that he was soon unable to talk even if he had so desired.

This having been done he made his way to the spot where Jacques was crouching behind the bushes.

"Why did you let that fellow yell that way?" demanded Jacques angrily.

"How did I know he was going to yell?"

"You should have known there was danger of it."

"Did you think of such a thing, before you left me?"

"No," said Jacques, "I didn't. Don't discuss it now, anyway. Look at this other man out here."

"Did he hear the shout?" asked Leon, as he peered out upon the field where the aëroplane was resting.

"Of course he heard it," said Jacques grimly. "I think they could have heard it in London. I never in my life heard such a loud voice."

"He acts as though he suspected something, all right," exclaimed Leon after a brief look from their hiding place.

"I should say he did. See, he's looking this way."

"Yes, and here he comes."

At the sound of his companion's voice the aviator that had been left with the machine started quickly to his feet. Facing the woods he gazed intently at them with a puzzled expression on his face. Evidently he was undecided whether his companion was in trouble or not, and he was waiting for the call to be repeated. Leon already had attended to that part of it, however.

The German stood for several moments, evidently listening as intently as he was able, and then, when he heard no further sound from his friend, he started to walk slowly forward. With his revolver in his hand he cautiously picked his way across the field.

"The man's a fool," exclaimed Jacques in a low voice.

"He certainly is," agreed Leon. "He's brave, but he's a fool."

"Still," said Jacques, "I don't think I'd run away just because I'd heard a shout. Especially if I was almost certain there was none of the enemy near-by. That's what this German thinks."

"He's so exposed, though," protested Leon. "He can't see us and we can see him perfectly. Our position is certainly far superior to his."

"Yes, and we must take advantage of it, too. This man is armed and ready for anything. We can't afford to treat him the way we did the other."

"It seems a shame."

"This is war, Leon," reminded Jacques. "Do you think he'd hesitate if he was in our position?"

"I know he wouldn't. Are you ready?"

"Let me give the word."

"All right," and both boys crouched low behind their ambush, with guns in their hands and fingers on the triggers.

The German had covered perhaps half the distance and now was about a hundred yards distant. He stopped and called the name of his companion, but of course received no answer. Then on he came once more. He was near enough now so that the two waiting boys could see him distinctly. They could make out the deadly whiteness of his skin, the eager glances of his eyes as he peered intently into the forest.

Sixty, fifty, forty yards away he was. Then he was only thirty yards distant and still Jacques made no sign. It seemed to Leon his comrade was never going to give the signal. The German came more slowly now. He was evidently nervous or suspicious.

He was scarcely twenty-five yards away when Jacques nudged Leon.

"Now," he said in a whisper.

CHAPTER XIII

A FRESH START FOR THE FRONT

THE two revolvers spoke at almost the same instant.

Neither shot went true to its mark, but the sharp bark of the automatics brought the German to a sudden halt. He raised his revolver and fired in the direction of the tiny puffs of smoke issuing from the bushes. The bullets crashed through the underbrush above the boys' heads while they returned the fire vigorously.

They were not expert shots with revolvers as can readily be imagined from the result of their efforts. The German was unhurt and now had turned and was running at top speed across the field. None of his shots had taken effect either, but he had been aiming at a blind target, while he had afforded an excellent mark himself.

"His cartridges are gone," exclaimed Jacques, springing to his feet.

"So are mine," cried Leon feverishly, trying to jam a fresh supply into the chambers of his gun. "Fire at him, Jacques! Fire!"

Jacques needed no advice on this score. He

took quick aim and once more fired at the fleeing German, who was now fifty yards distant and running at full speed. Evidently convinced that he was at a decided disadvantage, the aviator was risking his life no more than was necessary. He was making for his aëroplane as fast as his legs could carry him.

To the great surprise of both boys Jacques' first shot was the only one needed.

The speeding German stumbled momentarily, then pitched headlong to the ground and lay still.

"You've killed him," exclaimed Leon, stunned by the full realization of what was taking place.

"Don't be too sure of that," said Jacques. "You know how one of those Uhlans up in Belgium once fooled us.* This man may be only shamming."

"You hit him all right," insisted Leon.

"Well, if I did it was the best shot I ever made. Go slow now, Leon," he added, as they started out from the cover of the woods, and began to walk across the field to the place where the German was lying.

"Keep your revolver ready," cautioned Jacques.

"No need to worry about that."

Slowly and carefully they made their way over the rough ground. They were now within fifteen

* See "The Air Scout."

or twenty yards of where their opponent lay. He was stretched out at full length with his back toward the boys. His face could not be seen.

"There's his gun," whispered Leon.

"Where?"

"Lying out there on the ground. Don't you see it?"

"He may have another."

"I don't believe it. I think you killed him."

A loud groan immediately assured the two young soldiers that this was not the case, however.

"Look out," cried Jacques.

"I'm just going around in front of him," replied Leon. "I'm all right."

He made a short detour and approached the wounded aviator. He held his gun ready for instant use, however, in case the German should attempt a surprise of any kind. Meanwhile Jacques was also ready for any emergency.

When the German spied Leon, he merely held on to his shoulder and groaned.

"He's badly wounded," exclaimed Leon as he noted a thin stream of blood covering his enemy's shirt with its crimson stain.

"Never mind that. Search him first," directed Jacques.

"Keep him covered then."

Leon quickly convinced himself that the Ger-

man was not armed. His only weapon had evidently been the gun which he had discarded as he fell. This Leon appropriated to his own use.

"What shall we do with him now?" exclaimed Leon.

"Leave him where he is."

"We can't do that. He'd be sure to die out here in the sun."

"Do you think he'd worry about us if we were in his place?"

"Perhaps not, but I couldn't leave any man in this condition."

"You're too soft-hearted," said Jacques. "You forget that this is all a part of war, and that tenderness and war don't go together."

"That may be, but I refuse to abandon him this way."

"What do you propose to do?"

Leon was thoughtful for a moment in his effort to think of some means of disposing of their wounded enemy.

"If we stay here much longer, some one may come along and take the aëroplane away from us," remarked Jacques, somewhat irritated by his companion's delay.

"I know what we'll do," exclaimed Leon suddenly.

"What is it?"

"We'll untie our friend back there in the woods

and leave him to take care of his companion. That's the best we can do."

"Do you think it's safe to do that?"

"Why not?"

"He may cause trouble for us."

"How can he?" demanded Leon. "We're armed and he isn't. I don't see how he can possibly do us any harm."

"All right then, if you say so," agreed Jacques. "Let's not waste any time about it, though."

The boys immediately set out for the forest, leaving the wounded aviator still groaning and moaning on the ground.

"Do you think he's badly hurt?" inquired Leon of his friend.

"I don't believe so, though, of course, I don't know much about it. It strikes me, though, that if he was very badly wounded he couldn't writhe around and make as much fuss as he has been doing."

"I hope he does recover."

"Why do you hope that? He is a German and our enemy, and do you think he'd feel sorry if he had shot one of us?"

"No, of course not."

"Then what is the matter with you?"

"Well," said Leon, "this seems different. In a battle there are hundreds and thousands of men

and it may be all right to kill people then. When there are only two on each side I can't help feeling as if it was cold blooded and cruel."

"You're funny," laughed Jacques. "If I didn't know you as well as I do I might think you didn't have much nerve."

"You see what I mean though, don't you?"

"Yes, I do, and I think you are all right if you don't overdo it. First of all we must look out for ourselves though."

"I intend to do that all right," said Leon grimly.

At this moment they entered the woods and were soon standing over the prostrate body of their captured German.

"Hello, Oxford," Leon greeted him banteringly. "Have you felt lonesome without me to talk to you?"

The German merely glared at Leon and made no reply.

"Oh, come," urged Leon, "don't be angry. We've returned to untie you and let you go. Aren't you glad?"

At these words their captive's eyes gleamed, but he made no sound.

"We haven't much time, Leon," said Jacques. "Let's get to work."

"All right. I'll roll him over and you untie him."

The German had been lying flat on his back. Leon quickly grasped him by the arm, however, and turned him over so that he rested face downward. It was but the work of a moment to release his arms and when this was done the two young soldiers prepared to depart.

"You can untie your feet yourself," remarked Leon.

"Where's Karl?" exclaimed the German suddenly.

"Who's Karl?"

"My friend who was with me."

"Oh, yes," said Leon as if suddenly remembering something. "You'll find Karl resting out in the middle of the field. He's probably waiting for you and I feel sure he'll be glad to see you again."

The German merely growled something under his breath while he worked hard to loosen the strap which held his ankles.

"We'll make you a present of something before we leave, too," said Jacques.

The German looked at him suspiciously.

"Yes," continued Jacques, "we'll make you a present. At least, it is more of a trade than a present. We intend to take your aëroplane so we'll give you our automobile. If you walk about two hundred yards in that direction," and he pointed toward the woods as he spoke, "you'll

find a nice big Benz automobile in the middle of a clump of bushes. We have no further use for it, so if you think you'd like to have it, you're very welcome, I'm sure."

"That's the truth," added Leon seriously, for it was evident the German did not believe what Jacques had said.

"Will it run?" asked the German, only half convinced.

"It surely will," said Jacques. "It's a beautiful car, too. There may not be much gasoline in the tank, but otherwise it's in fine condition."

"Good-by and good luck to you," smiled Leon as he and Jacques started to walk away. The German paid no attention to him, however, but merely busied himself in brushing off his clothes, and stretching his limbs which were cramped from long being in one position.

"I'd love to stay and tease the fellow some more," chuckled Leon. "I never saw a man get so mad when you make fun of him."

"You wouldn't tease him if he didn't get mad, I suppose," laughed Jacques.

"Of course not. There's no fun in it if the person you are teasing doesn't pay any attention to you."

"Look at our wounded friend," exclaimed Jacques suddenly.

The two young soldiers had just emerged from

the woods and were surprised to see the man they had left writhing in pain, sitting up and looking all about him.

"I guess he wasn't as badly hurt as we thought, was he?" said Leon.

"It doesn't look so, and I think you need worry about him no more. He and his cheerful friend in the woods will soon be speeding down the road in their new automobile."

"We'd better speed away in our new aëroplane," exclaimed Leon.

"Right you are, and the sooner the better."

"Suppose we can't start it."

"Don't think of such a thing at a time like this."

"I don't want to. I certainly hope we have no trouble."

They had come to the place where the taube was resting and Jacques, with a critical eye, was soon inspecting the engine. He tested the cylinders and the many delicate little mechanisms attached to the motor.

"How does it seem?" inquired Leon, who had been an interested spectator of these proceedings.

"First rate. Everything is in fine order."

"Ready to start?"

"Right away. We'd better dress more warmly though."

In the car of the aëroplane they found sweaters

and heavy jackets. They did not hesitate to appropriate these articles of clothing and were soon bundled up and fully prepared for the cold currents they were sure to encounter when they were high in the air.

The engine was started and the boys took their places in the car.

"This seems like old times," exclaimed Leon delightedly.

"Doesn't it, though! This certainly is better than horses or automobiles, isn't it?"

"I told you we were lucky," insisted Leon.

"I'm not so sure of it even yet," smiled Jacques. "Are you ready?"

"All ready."

Jacques pulled a lever and the aëroplane shot forward and ran along the ground for a considerable distance. Then elevating the planes the young Frenchman caused the taube to rise from the ground and sail gracefully into the air.

Leon turned and waved his hand at the two Germans on the ground beneath him.

CHAPTER XIV

THROUGH THE AIR

"WHERE are we bound?"

"To Paris, of course."

"Do you know the way?"

"I think so."

"Well," said Leon, "do you think we can fly that far in one attempt?"

"I see no reason why we can't."

"All right, Jacques. I leave it all to you."

"Do we want to go to Paris, though?" exclaimed Leon a moment later. "We want to rejoin our regiment and if we run across the French army between here and Paris we will stop, won't we?"

"Oh, yes, of course. I only spoke of Paris, because I didn't know what else to say."

"Paris may have been captured by this time."

"Do you believe that it has been?" exclaimed Jacques angrily.

"No, I don't."

"Neither do I, and I don't think there are enough Germans in all of Germany to take Paris."

"Let us hope not," said Leon fervently.

They had risen to a height of nearly three thousand feet by this time and the earth beneath them seemed very far away. Neither boy had any feeling of uneasiness, however. Jacques was an aviator by profession and Leon, acting as his scout, had accompanied him on practically all of his flights in Belgium during the first part of the war. Consequently they were experienced in the art of flying and confidence usually comes with experience.

"It seems good to be up here again, doesn't it?" exclaimed Jacques.

"It certainly does."

"Let's try not to end this flight the way we did the last one we took together. Do you remember that?"

"When we hit the tree, you mean?"

"Yes, and what was it that made us hit the tree?"

"Why, one of our planes collapsed. You know that as well as I do."

"What made the plane collapse?" insisted Jacques.

"Bullet holes."

"That's what I'm getting at. How did we happen to have bullet holes there?"

"Why, the Germans shot at us, and happened to hit us, that's all."

"Yes," laughed Jacques, "that is exactly so.

I was trying to make you admit that it was because you insisted upon dropping that last bomb that we happened to be in a position to be struck."

"I wonder if there are any bombs in this aëroplane," exclaimed Leon.

"I don't think so."

"I'm going to look anyway."

"Well, if you do find any we'll take good care to be high enough up in the air so as to be well out of range of any German guns. I want to reach Paris."

"There are none here," said Leon a brief time afterward in a disappointed tone.

"I'm glad of it."

"Don't you like to drop bombs on your enemies?"

"Of course I do, but just now my one ambition is to find my regiment."

"We're making good time all right. What place is that ahead?"

"Arras, I should say," replied Jacques after a moment.

Far beneath them the city lay. The houses appeared so small that they all seemed to run in together. People on the streets looked to be the size of ants and without the aid of the field glasses Leon had discovered in the aëroplane, it would have been difficult for him to distinguish objects clearly.

"You're going directly over the town!" exclaimed Leon.

"Why not?"

"I don't know, except that I thought there might be more chance of being shot at above a town than in the country."

"Is any one looking up at us?"

"I should say so," replied Leon, peering down through his glasses. "In the square there is a big crowd of people and they are all looking up and pointing at us."

"They probably think we're going to drop a few bombs."

"I wish we could."

"Not here though."

"No, not here, but on the Germans when we come up with them."

"We may not see any of them at all," said Jacques.

"Why not? Where could they all disappear?"

"That's not it. We are pretty far to the west to strike any of the German armies, I think. I imagine that they are all to the left of us."

"Do you know that for sure?"

"No, that's only a guess, but it seems reasonable to me."

"Yes, I think it does," agreed Leon. "They all want to keep in touch with one another I suppose, and if one division got 'way over here it

might be cut off from the rest and either be forced to surrender or be destroyed."

"Still," said Jacques, "there's this about it. The Germans have been down this way in an effort to outflank our troops. If they succeeded in that it would be pretty serious business for the Allies."

"What do you mean 'outflank' them?"

"Why, to turn the flank, to get behind them or on one side and force them in toward the center. If they could do that they might be able to surround our troops. That might mean defeat."

"You mean that Germany would win the war if they could turn the flank of the Allies here?" demanded Leon in astonishment.

"I do not," said Jacques warmly. "They'll never win this war. At the beginning they may have more success than we do, but that's because they are better prepared and have more men. Wait till Russia gets going though, and wait till England's army begins to grow. Then you'll see the Allies chasing the Germans out of France instead of what has been happening here lately."

"How big is England's army?" asked Leon.

"You mean her regular army?"

"Yes."

"Not over two hundred thousand men, I should say."

"Oh, they must have more than that," Leon insisted.

"That doesn't include their reserves of course," continued Jacques. "They would bring the total up to about three quarters of a million."

"England hasn't nearly as large an army as some of the other nations then?"

"No, she hasn't," said Jacques. "Of course I haven't included their troops in India and Canada and their other colonies. Before very long England will have a big army over here just the same. Don't fool yourself about that."

"We can use them all right."

"I guess we can. We don't know much about the situation here now though. Since we left Mons we might as well have been in South America for all the knowledge we have as to what is going on."

"That's all right," said Leon confidently. "Just wait a little while now and we'll be right in the thick of it again."

"We will, if we're lucky."

"We're that all right, just as I've often told you lately. You said our luck was not going to keep, but you see it has. Just think how everything has come out right for us lately and how much faster we are traveling than we expected. You must admit you never thought you'd be so near Paris by this time."

"No, I can't say I did," Jacques admitted. "Still I don't like to hear you talking about luck all the time. I'm afraid it will change if we do."

The aëroplane now was racing through the air. The boys were comfortably dressed in the clothes they had appropriated and were perfectly happy. At times they conversed and then again they remained silent for some moments, while they looked at the fertile green land beneath them and dreamed of the time soon to come when they should have another chance to distinguish themselves on the battlefield.

From their seats, high in the air, none of the scars of war could be seen. The little villages seemed to be peaceful and the farmhouses cozy and comfortable. The country appeared fresh and everywhere beautiful. Like great white ribbons the roads wound their way in and out among the hills, even at this distance giving promise of smoothness and comfort to those who traveled over them.

Leon never ceased marveling at these wonderful highways.

"I never saw such splendid roads," he exclaimed, turning to Jacques.

"They are wonderful," said Jacques simply.

"They're certainly fine for motorcycles and automobiles. When this war is over I intend to come over here again with a motorcycle."

"There may be no roads when the war is over," said Jacques sadly. "Think of the thousands of men and horses that are marching over them; the hundreds of ammunition and supply wagons; the great guns and all the other things that go with an army."

"That's right," said Leon, "the roads are likely to be badly torn up, aren't they?"

"I should say so. Just think what some of those heavy guns would do to a road in wet weather when the ground is soft."

"The only way to save them then, as far as I can see," exclaimed Leon, "is to drive the Germans out of France as fast as we can. The roads will be even more cut up when winter comes and the frost gets into the ground."

"It's easier to talk about driving them out than it is to do it, I fear."

"Oh, I don't know," laughed Leon. "The Allies will soon have us with them again and think what a help that will be."

"I hope we'll soon be with them as you say."

"How far are we from Paris now?"

"Let's see. How long ago was it when we left Arras?"

"About an hour."

"And we flew over Amiens about twenty minutes ago. We should be close to Paris in a very short time now."

"There's a city ahead of us now. What is it?"

"Beauvais, I think. That's about half way between Amiens and Paris."

"This is somewhat faster than being on foot, I should say," remarked Leon. "Think of the different ways we've traveled since we left Mons. On foot at first, then in a hay wagon, then on horseback, then in an automobile, and now in an aëroplane. Every one faster than the one preceding it. I don't see what we can do next, do you?"

"I hope we shall need nothing more," laughed Jacques.

As the aëroplane came closer and closer to Paris the spirits of the boys steadily rose. They felt that they were nearing the end of their journey and they were both impatient to be back in harness once more.

"There's a river ahead!" exclaimed Leon a few moments later.

"That's the Oise," replied Jacques. "A few miles from here it joins the Seine and flows down into the English Channel near Havre."

"We must be very near Paris then."

"We're almost in Paris. I'm going to turn east here and fly around the city. We haven't seen any troops at all so far and it worries me. I say we look around a little before we do anything else."

"All right," agreed Leon. "You're the boss."

They turned and headed toward the east. To their right was Paris, seen dimly in the distance, while the two boys in their aëroplane merely skirted the suburbs of the great city. Leon kept a sharp lookout below him for signs of troops, but he saw none.

"All the houses are torn down," he exclaimed suddenly.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Jacques in astonishment.

"Just what I say. All the houses are torn down. Do you suppose the Germans have destroyed them?"

"I don't know. Perhaps so. Either that or the French tore them down themselves so that the buildings would not be in range of their guns. There is a big fort three or four miles to our right."

"That must be it," said Leon. "They don't look as if they had been hit by shells. They are razed even with the ground."

"We've evidently been missing something by not being here," said Jacques anxiously. "I hope Paris is still in our hands."

"I hope it is too. Do you intend to fly all the way around the city?"

"We'll keep on until we discover something."

On they flew steering a course due east.

"There's another river," announced Leon.

"The Ourcq," said Jacques.

"I see smoke too," cried Leon excitedly. "Over toward our right."

"Much of it?"

"I should say so. I believe they're blowing up the whole country. I can hear guns too. Jacques, we're in the thick of it again."

"It certainly looks so. Now what we want to do is to land among our own troops and not among the Germans."

"There seem to be two lines. The one on this side must be the German. Fly over them, Jacques, and we'll soon find out."

"We'll keep well out of range, too," said Jacques soberly.

"There's another river here," exclaimed Leon. "I never saw so many rivers."

"That's the Marne. That joins the Ourcq east of Paris. Can you see whether those troops below are French or German?"

"They're Germans," said Leon. "The others are surely French and we'll soon be with them."

The battlefield below them must have been a busy place, as both boys agreed. Great masses of troops could be seen intrenched, while a cloud of smoke hung over all. The great guns belched forth a steady stream of shot and shell while the roar of it all could be heard even at the height

at which the two returning young soldiers were flying.

"I'm going to land now," announced Jacques, when they had reached a spot somewhat in the rear of the French lines.

Down, down, down they went in great easy circles. Leon was peering intently over the side of the car when suddenly he uttered a startled exclamation.

"They're firing at us, Jacques!" he cried. "Our own troops are firing at us!"

CHAPTER XV

THE ARRIVAL AT THE MARNE

"YOU don't mean it!" exclaimed Jacques in astonishment. "They can't be firing at us."

At the same time he unconsciously pulled the lever and caused the aëroplane to mount rapidly higher and higher into the air.

"They are shooting at us, just the same," said Leon. "We'd better get out of here just as fast as we can too. Certainly we can't land here."

"I don't understand it," said Jacques, while as he spoke the taube rocked slightly and a bullet hole appeared in the tip of one wing.

"I do," exclaimed Leon suddenly. "We're in a German aëroplane, Jacques. Why shouldn't they fire at us?"

"How stupid we are," cried Jacques disgustedly. "We deserve to be shot for being so careless and so silly."

"Well, we stand a good chance all right," said Leon grimly. "There are plenty of people firing at us. Every little puff of smoke I see, seems to

be aimed directly at us. How soon will we be out of range?''

''In about one minute.''

''Don't make it any longer.''

It was an exciting minute that followed. Leon could plainly see that they were the target for hundreds of guns on the battleline below. As he peered anxiously downward he wondered if the Allies hadn't forgotten about the German hosts that opposed them. It seemed as if the two boys in their aëroplane were the one object the soldiers below had made up their minds to destroy.

Not more than a hundred and fifty feet below them a shell exploded. The air was rent by the concussion and the force of the explosion caused the frail craft they were in suddenly to drop. Only the skill and quick wit of the young Frenchman at the wheel saved them from capsizing.

Both boys' faces were white and set as they struggled for their lives. To Leon it seemed as if hours had passed since his comrade had last spoken about the minute that must elapse before they should be safely out of range. He glanced frequently at the bullet hole in the tip of the wing. Would this prove their undoing he wondered, as the same thing had so nearly done in Belgium a short time before?

The shell that had so nearly caused their destruction had robbed them of some of their head-

way, as well as forced them lower. This meant more time before they would be entirely out of range, and every second was precious. What a horrible ending, thought Leon, to be killed by the guns of your own army.

"We're safe, now, I guess," exclaimed Jacques at length.

"Thank goodness," sighed Leon in great relief.

"Are they still shooting at us?"

"I can't tell. They are quite far behind us now."

"We're all right, I'm sure."

"Whew, what a narrow escape!" exclaimed Leon. "You know, I feel weak after that, and I never hope to spend another five minutes like the last."

"Weren't we stupid?"

"That hardly expresses it," said Leon hotly. "We're fine soldiers, we are, to do a thing like that! Just imagine what might have happened to us."

"Let's try to forget it. Suppose we should reach camp and tell every one what a thing we did. Why, we'd never hear the last of it."

"And we don't deserve to, either."

"Just think," said Jacques. "We made our way from Belgium right down to Paris, only to wind up our journey by the most stupid performance I have ever heard of. We are the luck-

iest people on earth to be alive now, I can tell you!"

"Ah, ha, at last you admit we are lucky, do you?"

"This time I do, but our luck almost left us, didn't it?"

"It certainly did. I never hope to come so close again."

"Look down," directed Jacques. "If you don't see any one and if there is a good place nearby, we'll land."

"Right beneath us," exclaimed Leon, after a hasty examination of the earth below.

"Sure there are no troops nearby?"

"Absolutely."

The taube, in response to Jacques' manipulations, began to descend. This time there was nothing to interfere with their descent and in a very few minutes the two young soldiers were once more on solid ground.

"Now what shall we do with the aëroplane?" said Leon.

"I was just thinking of that, and I don't know what we ought to do."

"We can't use it, that's sure."

"Nor could any of our troops use it very well."

"It might be very useful in scouting over the German army. None of their soldiers would fire at it."

"I know," said Jacques, "but there would be too much confusion and risk when returning. I think we'd better destroy it."

"That seems a terrible shame," protested Leon.

"I know it does, but what else can we do? If it's of no use to our army we don't want to run any chance of having it fall into the hands of the Germans again. I guess we'll have to burn it up."

"All right," Leon agreed. "How are you going to do it?"

"No trouble about that. Have you any matches?"

"Just one," replied Leon, feeling in all his pockets.

"That'll do."

Jacques quickly unscrewed the top of the gasoline tank. Tearing a strip from his shirt he dipped it in the fuel until it was thoroughly saturated. Then he placed one end of his improvised fuse in the tank while the other hung loosely over the edge.

"Now we're ready," he exclaimed, at the same time lighting one end of the strip.

"We'd better run," he cried, and both boys sprinted at full speed for about forty or fifty yards. They stopped then and turned just in time to see a great flame burst from the gasoline tank and envelope the whole aëroplane. A mo-

ment later what was once a beautiful piece of machinery had become a twisted mass of junk.

"That aëroplane was good to us, and I'm sorry to see it go," said Leon sadly.

"Yes, it was too bad, but we did the wisest thing, I think."

"No doubt of it. Now let's go back to the battle and see what we find."

The sound of the firing could be distinctly heard as the two boys started off to complete what they hoped would be the final stage of their journey. A steady rumbling and roaring sound informed them that a great battle was raging not far away. The earth shook with the force of the explosions.

"How far away are we from the battle?" inquired Leon.

"About five miles, I should say."

"We'll be there in a little over an hour then, won't we?"

"I should think so. It'll be dark before that time, too."

"What do we care?" laughed Leon. "It may be all the better for us anyway. Perhaps they'd shoot at us if we came along in the daytime."

"I can't get over that trick of ours," exclaimed Jacques. "I hope no one will ask us anything about it."

"From the sound of that cannonading I should

say that those people up in front of us had all they could attend to on their own account, without bothering with other people's affairs."

"There is certainly a terrible battle going on," exclaimed Jacques. "I hope our men are winning. So far everything seems to have been in favor of the Germans. Think how far they've come since we saw them last."

"All the way from Belgium."

"I should say so. Isn't that awful?"

"You notice that the French still have Paris, though," remarked Leon. "I think we'll drive them back yet."

"How did they get 'way down here so quickly?"

"Easiest thing in the world. They had more men than we did, and we couldn't stop them till now. If the Allies have collected some more troops in the meantime and can put as many men in the field as the Germans have, we'll drive them back. You wait and see."

"There was an army being formed in Paris, I know," said Jacques.

"Do you know," exclaimed Leon, "that just before we crossed the Ourcq River I thought I saw a great mass of men off to our right? They seemed to be coming from Paris. Do you suppose that could be the army you just mentioned?"

"I don't know, but I shouldn't be surprised if it was."

"Let's hope they do their part," said Leon earnestly.

The two young soldiers were walking briskly along the road in the direction of the battle. Louder and louder sounded the roar of the artillery as they came nearer and nearer. Unconsciously the two boys quickened their pace and hastened forward. The smell of powder and smoke came faintly to their nostrils and acted as a spur to their tired feet.

Neither one thought of food as they walked rapidly forward in the gathering darkness. The roar of battle was in their ears and the desire to be in it was in their hearts.

"We'll soon be there, I'm glad to say," remarked Leon.

"Yes, and we must report, the first thing we do."

"Where shall we report?"

"At headquarters, of course. You didn't expect to go right out in the trenches now, did you?"

"Why, I had thought something of doing that," laughed Leon. "I guess I don't know as much about military matters as I should."

"Don't let that worry you," said Jacques reassuringly. "You know all that's necessary for your work."

"What is my official standing anyway? Do you know?"

"You're a scout. At first you were attached to the aviation corps, and you may be again for all I know. You'll probably be kept as a scout anyway, though this time it may be with the cavalry."

"That wouldn't be so bad," Leon remarked. "Still I think I'd rather be in the aviators' division."

"Perhaps all the aëroplanes are destroyed by now, or there may not be enough left to go around. We may both get a new job."

"Well, I don't care much, though I do hope things will be arranged so that we can be together. I'd feel lost without you now, Jacques."

"That feeling is mutual," replied the young Frenchman simply, and Leon could detect a slight catch in his comrade's voice as he spoke.

For some time they remained silent as they cautiously proceeded. In fact the roar of the battle made conversation difficult. The rattle of musketry could be heard frequently during a lull in the firing of the heavy guns and mortars.

"We ought to strike the outposts in a minute," exclaimed Jacques, making himself heard with difficulty.

Hardly had he spoken when they came in sight

of the battlefield. It was so dark that it was impossible to see all that was occurring, but the flash of firing from all sides made it very evident that the fight was being carried on in deadly earnest.

It was a fascinating yet terrible sight and both boys stopped short and looked on in amazement. All along a line extending a seemingly indefinite distance the French troops were posted. The heavy artillery kept up a constant cannonade, but the fire of the smaller guns seemed to be slackening.

"The fighting is slowing down, now that night is coming on," said Jacques.

"Well, no human beings could keep up much longer the pace set here a while ago," replied Leon. "I should think the noise would drive the men in the trenches crazy, if it didn't stop once in a while."

"Some do lose their minds," said Jacques, as he once more started to walk forward. "Come on, Leon!" he called.

They made their way slowly toward the battle-line and the place where just ahead of them they could see that the supply wagons were stationed. At least, they supposed this to be the case, for it was too dark to see distinctly.

Perhaps they had covered twenty or twenty-five yards when the figure of a man suddenly

loomed up out of the darkness and a moment later the two boys were looking into the barrel of a long rifle, to the end of which was attached a gleaming bayonet.

CHAPTER XVI

UNDER SUSPICION

A SHARP challenge was flung at them through the darkness.

It was in French, and both boys instantly heaved a sigh of relief. At last they were back among the Allies and their troubles were over. How little did they suspect what was in store for them.

"Who are you?" questioned the sentinel sharply.

"We have just rejoined the army," replied Jacques, speaking in his own tongue, for evidently the sentry understood no other.

"Why were you absent from it?"

"We became separated from our regiment in Belgium, and have just succeeded in forcing our way back."

"You have no uniforms on," said the guard suspiciously.

"We were in the aviation corps. We did not wear the regulation uniform, and the clothes we had are now in rags."

"You'd better tell your story to the officer in

charge," said the guard. "Come along with me, both of you."

Walking in front of the sentry the two young soldiers obediently made their way. Their captor marched behind them and directed their course.

"What's the trouble?" asked Leon, who had understood nothing of what had passed between Jacques and the soldier.

"He suspects we are spies or—"

"Silence there!" commanded the guard sharply.

The boys quickly obeyed and no further words were spoken by them until they arrived at their destination. This proved to be a country house, about a half mile distant, in which headquarters had been established.

The two young captives were led inside, deprived of their weapons and then locked in a nearby room. Outside, sentries could be observed walking regularly up and down in front of the house.

"This is a nice fix," exclaimed Leon, flinging himself down upon a chair at one end of the room.

"I should say it was. I must say I never expected to be captured and held as a spy by my own army."

"That sentinel was a fool," said Leon hotly. "He ought to have known enough to realize that we are all right. Do we look like spies?"

"Well, I don't know," laughed Jacques. "If I look like you I might be taken for almost anything."

"You're not very beautiful," said Leon. "Perhaps we do look suspicious. Still, I don't believe we'll have any trouble in proving who we are, do you?"

"How are we to prove it?"

"I don't know, but I don't see how we can help it. Maybe we'll see some one we know I'm not worried anyway. I think it is a good joke."

"I hope it turns out that way," said Jacques. "Anyway, there's no use in worrying. I think I'll take a little nap here until they call us again. No man can tell when that will be."

"A good idea," exclaimed Leon; and both boys were preparing to stretch themselves upon the big double bed that occupied part of their room, when the door opened and a soldier summoned them to follow him.

Down the hall of the great country house they went, until they came to the end. Here they turned to the right and were ushered into what was manifestly used as the dining room.

Several officers were seated about a table from which the dishes evidently had just been removed. The men were studying maps and glanced up quickly as the two young prisoners were led before them. A short conversation ensued between

the guard and the gray-haired officer who was apparently in command.

"You are under suspicion of being German spies," said the officer sternly, turning to the two young soldiers who now were standing before him. "What have you to say for yourselves?"

Jacques acted as spokesman. As a matter of fact it would have been impossible for Leon to undertake that duty, speaking only a little French as he did.

"We are both enlisted in the French army," said Jacques. "We were in the fighting in Belgium and after the battle at Mons became separated from our regiment. We have just succeeded in making our way down here."

"You came all the way from Belgium?" inquired the officer skeptically.

"Yes, sir," replied Jacques.

"Is your friend here French?" asked the officer.

"He is an American, who enlisted in the French army while he was in Belgium soon after the war broke out."

"He looks like a German," remarked their questioner. "Tell me how you made your way from Belgium here so easily," he went on.

"My friend here was wounded at Mons," began Jacques. "He was in the hospital there and when he was discharged he started out on foot to rejoin his regiment. I had been separated

from my division and also was stranded. On the outskirts of Mons we met by accident."

"That sounds unlikely," sniffed the officer. "Don't go into details in your story. Tell me how you happened to be here in the rear of the French lines if you came from Belgium. How did you manage to get around our forces and approach us from this side?"

"We didn't go 'round the lines. We came over them."

"Over them?"

"Yes," replied Jacques. "We flew over in an aëroplane."

The officer laughed heartily at this. "I suppose," he said, "that you'll tell me next that you were in that German taube that sailed over us this afternoon."

"That's just where we were," exclaimed Jacques quickly.

"Look here, young man," said the officer sharply. "I don't propose to have you make fun of me, and if you expect me to believe any such ridiculous statement as the one you just made, you are wrong."

"But I am telling you the truth," protested Jacques.

"Very well, then," sneered the officer. "Kindly tell me where you got the aëroplane and how you happened to be able to run it."

"We captured the taube near Douai from two German aviators. They had landed in a field next to some woods in which we were hiding. We caught one of them and bound him, and the other one we shot, wounding him in the shoulder. We appropriated the aëroplane and started for Paris. That was late this morning and here we are. I happened to know how to run the machine because that is my business. I am a member of the aviators' division, attached to the twentieth army corps of the French army."

During this recital the officers gathered about the table had looked at the speaker in amazement. Jacques told his story in such a straightforward way, however, that evidently some of the listeners were inclined to believe he was speaking the truth.

The appearance of the two young soldiers was so ragged and unkempt that, as Jacques had previously remarked, they might be taken for almost anything. In war times an army must protect itself to the fullest extent of its power also, and no chances are taken. Naturally the officers were careful.

The officer in charge looked at Jacques searchingly. "I hope you are telling the truth, young man," he said, "for if you are not, it will go hard with you and your companion. This is no time for fooling, you know."

"I swear I am telling only the exact truth," insisted Jacques.

"What is your name?"

Before Jacques had a chance to reply there was a commotion at the door and all the officers at the table sprang to their feet. The two boys turned their heads to observe the cause of this fresh excitement and beheld an elderly man with white hair and a white mustache enter the room accompanied by two aides. He wore the shoulder straps of a general and as he walked forward every one saluted.

His sharp eyes swept the room and every one in it. Then he turned to the officer who had been questioning the boys.

"Good evening, Colonel," he said. "What is happening here?"

"These two young men were brought in by the guard and are suspected of being spies. We were questioning them."

The general looked at the two young men keenly.

"Tell me your story," he said.

Jacques once more related the story of their adventures from the time they left Mons until they arrived at the Marne. He did not elaborate on the story, but neither did he leave out anything.

"That is all," he remarked simply when he had finished.

The general for a moment was silent and thoughtful. "Nothing you have related is impossible," he said, "and yet it is a thrilling tale. What is your name, young man?"

"Jacques Dineau."

"Jacques Dineau," repeated the general. "That name sounds familiar to me, and yet I can't seem to place it exactly."

"I have been in the army four years, your excellency," said Jacques.

"Where did you serve?"

"First in Morocco, then here in France. Upon my return from Africa, over two years ago, I was detailed to the aviation corps and have been there ever since."

The general appeared to be trying to think of something that had escaped his memory. The other officers regarded him curiously, for it was evidently not his custom to concern himself with every suspect in this manner. Leon was at a loss to understand what was happening about him, and he wondered who this distinguished looking man, whom every one seemed to respect so thoroughly, could be.

"You say you were in the fighting at Mons?" questioned the general.

"Yes, General," replied Jacques.

The general's face suddenly lighted up. "Did not you and a comrade save a French flag from capture?" he asked quickly.

"I had that honor," answered Jacques, blushing deeply at the mention of his heroism. "I and my companion here."

"I knew I had heard your name," exclaimed the general. "A full account of your deed, together with a recommendation for promotion were handed me. I am glad to meet two such brave young soldiers," and he shook hands warmly with both Jacques and Leon.

"You are an American, I hear," said the general, addressing Leon in excellent English.

"Yes, General," replied Leon, saluting.

"Well sir, I want to thank you for your devoted service to us in these troublesome times. We are proud to have such soldiers in our army."

Leon, who had caught but little of what had been said, did not know the reason for this demonstration and merely blushed and stammered in reply.

"Now, Colonel," said the general, turning once more to the officer who had first questioned the boys, "I don't imagine you want to detain these young men any longer."

"I should say not," was the hearty reply, and at once, not only the colonel but all the officers

in the room came forward and cordially shook hands with both boys.

"Where do you expect to sleep to-night?" asked the colonel, after this small reception was at an end. The general who was responsible for their release was now busily engaged in conversation with several officers at the opposite end of the room. Dispatches were being handed to him and he was busy poring over a huge map spread out in front of him.

"I've no idea," said Jacques.

"I'll see that you are kept here," said the colonel, and summoning an orderly he gave a few short directions.

The boys were led back into the room from which a short time before they had been brought as prisoners. Here they were to spend the night and both boys looked longingly at the big soft bed, the first one that they had a chance to sleep in for some time.

Clean night clothes were provided for them and the orderly then withdrew.

"How I do expect to sleep to-night!" exclaimed Leon. "By the way, who was that general who was talking to us and who got us off?"

"Don't you know?"

"No, of course I don't."

"That was General Joffre," said Jacques quietly.

CHAPTER XVII

AT HEADQUARTERS

WHEN Jacques had told Leon all that General Joffre had said, the young American became so excited that in spite of his weariness he had great difficulty in falling asleep.

To think that he had been personally congratulated by the commander-in-chief of the Western Allied armies! What a story that would make when he reached home again. How envious his friends would be. He wished his brother, Earl, could hear of his good fortune. And what would his uncle in Paris say? Leon almost laughed aloud as he thought of him. "He'll think I'm about the greatest man in the whole world," Leon said to himself.

Then he remembered what Jacques had told him about promotion. Suppose he were to be made a lieutenant, or should be decorated with the Legion of Honor. It all seemed too wonderful to be true, and when Leon finally fell asleep he dreamed all night long of heroic deeds and crowds of cheering

people acclaiming him as he rode through the streets of Paris in his triumphal carriage.

Both boys awoke in the morning greatly refreshed. At first they could not recall where they were, nor how they came to be there.

The sounds of distant cannonading, however, recalled them to their senses.

"You know," remarked Leon, "I think those guns sound farther away than they did last night."

"Yes, I think they do," agreed Jacques, listening intently.

"Perhaps we're driving the Germans back."

"Maybe they're nearer Paris."

"The only thing to do is to get up and find out," exclaimed Leon, springing out of bed as he spoke. "Come on, Jacques."

"Oh, I hate to leave this bed," sighed Jacques, slowly following his friend's example.

A bathroom adjoined their bedroom and soon the two young soldiers were preparing for a plunge. A long time had elapsed since they had been able to indulge in such a luxury and it was consequently appreciated all the more on that account.

Returning to their bedroom they found there a soldier waiting for them. He had brought them new uniforms and a complete change of clothes, so that they were soon equipped better than ever

before. As soon as they had dressed, they sallied forth and obtained breakfast. This accomplished, they were at a loss as to what they should next do.

"We ought to report," said Jacques, "but I don't know where to do it."

"Aren't we at headquarters now?"

"I think we are, but to whom ought we to go? Do you know?"

"I have no idea."

"Well, we'd better find out at once. Let's look around."

"Down this way first," suggested Leon, and the two young soldiers started to walk down the wide hall of the house.

They had gone but a short distance when they met the colonel who had questioned them the night before. They saluted and he stopped.

"I want to see you two young men," he said pleasantly. "Where were you going?"

"We want to report," replied Jacques, "but we don't know where to go."

"That is what I wanted to talk to you about," said the colonel. "You are to report to me at noon to-day, in the same room in which we were last evening."

The officer immediately passed on down the hall, leaving the two boys to their own devices.

"Well," exclaimed Leon, after Jacques had de-

livered this message to him, "what are we going to do until noon? That's a long time off."

"Suppose we look around the house here for a while."

"Won't we be ordered out if we do?"

"Ordered out of the house do you mean?"

"Yes," said Leon. "I thought maybe they wouldn't care to have us prowling around headquarters when a big battle is going on."

"All right then, we'll go outside and see what is to be seen there."

They sauntered down the hall and out to the broad veranda of the château. Broad lawns stretched away in front of the house, with great trees scattered here and there upon them. White driveways wound around the grassy stretches, and through a distant gate occasional glimpses of a garden could be had.

Everywhere bustle and activity were manifest. Automobiles raced in and out of the grounds, men on horseback galloped hither and thither, while noisy motorcycles buzzed incessantly back and forth. Every one, except our two young soldiers, seemed to be in a hurry and to have plenty to do. They were apparently the only idlers on the scene.

"What a sight this is!" exclaimed Leon. "Did you ever see such activity?"

"Great things are happening," replied Jacques,

"and it keeps a good many men busy to see that everything is run in the right way."

"It certainly seems to," agreed Leon. "I suppose General Joffre is even busier where he is than these people are here."

"There is no question about that, I guess."

"My!" exclaimed Leon. "I'd like to be out there on the battlefield with him now."

"On the battlefield?"

"Why, of course. Where else would he be?"

"Look here, Leon," said Jacques. "Don't fool yourself for a minute. General Joffre is not out on the battlefield. He is right in this house."

"What do you mean by saying that?"

"Just what I say. He is in this house."

"What is he doing here?" demanded Leon, much surprised at his comrade's statement. "Why isn't he out where he can see what is going on?"

"Because this is the place for him to be. On the battlefield he couldn't see what is going on. Here he knows everything that happens."

"How does he?"

"Upstairs in that room," said Jacques, pointing as he spoke, "there is a great big map. That map has on it every road, canal, railway, river, hill, clump of trees, valley, swamp, bridge and everything else you can think of that is in the district covered by the battles."

"That can't show him where the troops are, though," insisted Leon. "They are changing positions all the time and he can't possibly follow them."

"You're wrong again," laughed Jacques. "Let me tell you something. Besides the map, there is a wonderful collection of waxheaded pins. They are of all different colors and sizes and indicate the different kinds of troops. These pins are placed in the map and show exactly where each division is stationed."

"That's wonderful," exclaimed Leon, "but how can they tell just where each division is at a certain time? I should think they'd shift so quickly that it would be impossible to keep the map up to date."

"Not at all. The room is full of telephones and there is a telegraph too. Besides the regular kind there is also a wireless. Then the spies and aviators are constantly bringing in reports. You'll find that that map is as accurate as anything could possibly be under the circumstances."

"Who attends to all that?"

"You mean the map?"

"Yes. Who changes the pins? General Joffre?"

"No," said Leon. "General Bertholet, and his aides have charge of that. It is his duty to keep the map in such shape that at any hour of the day

or night General Joffre may look at it and absolutely rely upon it."

"Who is General Bertholet?"

"He is Chief of Staff."

"I should think he had a pretty hard job," remarked Leon thoughtfully. "You say he has to have the map ready for inspection even in the middle of the night?"

"Why, of course."

"I don't see how one man can direct all that. When does he get any sleep?"

"He lives in his pajamas most of the time, they say. He may be asleep when suddenly the telephone will ring. General Bertholet jumps out of bed, wide awake instantly. He learns over the telephone that a battle is about to commence and that the Germans are attacking in a certain place."

"Who is it that telephones to him?" inquired Leon.

"Why, some man on the battlefield, or near enough to it for him to know just what is going on in that particular place."

"Where does he find a telephone on the battlefield?" persisted Leon. "I suppose there must be a telephone girl and a private booth out there."

"Don't be silly, Leon," protested Jacques.

"I don't see how it's done, that's all."

"Why, every army has a field telephone. It is connected with headquarters and is carried right

up to the battle line. Each division of the army has a telephone so that at headquarters they receive reports immediately of any change that takes place in the fight."

"That is wonderful, isn't it?"

"Yes, and I started to tell you how it all works," said Jacques. "You interrupted me before I had a chance, however."

"I am sorry," said Leon. "Go ahead and I won't stop you again."

"Well," went on Jacques, "suppose General Bertholet gets a report that the Germans are attacking a certain division and also that they have numbers superior to the French. The general in command of that division wants reënforcements at once. Very well. General Bertholet knows that five or ten miles in back of that particular division are quartered several thousand reserves. He also learns from the pins on the map that a number of autobuses are near the reserves. He immediately gives orders that these reserves shall proceed with four batteries of 75-millimeter artillery, ten machine guns and three squadrons of cavalry to reënforce the division that is in need of aid. Before ten minutes have elapsed several thousand reënforcements are on their way to the front."

"It sounds simple enough," said Leon.

"It is simple when you understand how it

works. Everything is done right from here; every one knows his business and there is no confusion."

"Let me ask you something," exclaimed Leon. "You said General Bertholet learned from the pins that there were autobuses nearby. I thought you said the pins indicated troops."

"So they do. They indicate autobuses too, and almost every other thing you could possibly mention. Why, they even show the size of the guns and the kind of ammunition used in them."

"General Bertholet must have to keep very familiar with everything on the map."

"That hardly expresses it," laughed Jacques. "He probably knows that map as well as he does his own face."

"Yet it must be constantly changing."

"It certainly is. Every time a bridge is blown up or a pontoon thrown across a stream or a food convoy changes position, General Bertholet shifts the pins on the map."

"When does he sleep or eat?" inquired Leon.

"Whenever he can. I told you he lived in his pajamas most of the time, and between battles he tries to get a little rest. He is up and down pretty much all the time. I guess he eats the same way he sleeps and that is whenever he can find two minutes when he is able to stay away from his map."

"It must be good fun, though."

"I imagine the men in charge don't think it's much 'fun.' A business as serious as war can't have a great deal of 'fun' in it. Everything has to be absolutely accurate, too. Just think, one mistake in that room up there might cause the defeat of the whole army."

"That's right," agreed Leon, "and think of how big an area has to be covered all the time. How long is the battle line now? Do you know?"

"Nearly two hundred miles, I heard some one say."

"What!" exclaimed Leon. "As long as that?"

"It extends all the way from Paris to Alsace," said Jacques. "It is a crooked line, too, running through Chalons, Verdun, Nancy and down almost to Luneville. That must cover two hundred miles easily."

"It does if you say so," said Leon. "Those places you mentioned don't mean anything to me. I know one thing, though, and that is, that I'd like to be out on that line somewhere right now."

"What time is it?"

"About quarter to twelve," replied Leon, consulting his watch.

"We'll go and report then. Perhaps after we have received our orders we may find ourselves on the firing line only too soon."

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE TRENCHES

PROMPTLY at noon the two young soldiers presented themselves at the door of the room where the night before they had been cross-examined. They were soon admitted and were greeted pleasantly by their new friend, the colonel.

"Are you young men ready to go back to work?" he asked.

"Indeed, we are," replied Jacques. "It was for that very purpose that we have tried so hard to make our way here from Belgium."

"Very well," agreed the colonel, smiling at the young soldiers' enthusiasm. "Your regiment is with the twentieth army corps and is now at Bar le Duc. I suppose you would rather be with your old regiment than any other."

"Yes," replied Jacques, "unless you want us somewhere else."

"I had hoped to keep you here," said the colonel. "You did such splendid work in Belgium as scouts that I wanted to use you for that same purpose now. It could not be arranged just

at the present time, however, so I can give you your choice. I can send you wherever you wish to go."

"We'd rather go back to our own regiment under the circumstances, I'm sure," said Jacques. "When do we start?"

"You seem eager to be off," smiled the colonel.

"We have been away a long time, Colonel," said Jacques. "We are anxious to be back in the center of things once more."

"That is the right spirit," exclaimed the colonel rising. "Here are orders for you to secure full equipment and you will be notified shortly at what time a troop train will take you to the front."

The conversation was evidently at an end. The boys saluted and turned toward the door when the colonel called them back.

"I nearly forgot one thing," he said. "Both of you young men have been recommended for decoration for bravery. I hope that very soon I shall be able to send word to you that the formality of granting you this honor is over."

The colonel bent to his work once more, leaving the two young soldiers standing in the center of the room, their heads swimming. As they walked out of the door it almost seemed to them that they were walking on air.

"What do you think about that?" exclaimed

Jacques, when he had translated the colonel's words to Leon.

"I don't believe it's true," said Leon. "I'm sure you must be dreaming."

"No such thing. I repeated his very words to you."

"Well, then," exclaimed Leon, "all I can say is that I feel more important than any other man in France. Look at me, Jacques. Has my head grown any larger?"

"I think not," laughed Jacques. "I'm sure mine has, though."

"How about our luck now?" queried Leon. "Will you agree with me now that we are blessed with good fortune? I haven't mentioned the subject for some time, but I don't see how you can possibly dispute it any more."

"I don't intend to. I think it is true and I am hoping as hard as I can that our luck will never forsake us."

"Shall we give three cheers for ourselves?"

"We'd better get our equipment before we do anything else," laughed Jacques.

In a short time the two young soldiers were fully fitted out for service at the front. Each carried a rifle and wore a cartridge belt about his waist. A blanket was slung over his shoulder and the boys appeared very much like the many other thousands of French soldiers. In their uniforms

the privates seemed to be many editions of the same man, and at a short distance it was next to impossible to distinguish one from another.

An hour later they were seated in a compartment of one of the little French railway carriages, bound for the front. Four other men were in the same compartment and they were a happy-go-lucky lot. To see them one might think they were starting for a holiday instead of for a battle. They were light-hearted, they sang and laughed and joked and appeared to be in the best of spirits. Leon commented on this fact to his comrade who had been conversing with the other men.

"One reason why they seem so happy is because the Germans have been driven back from Paris," said Jacques.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Leon excitedly.

"Just what I say. One of these men just gave me the news and he declares it is true. He says that when the Germans came almost up to the city, the army of Paris came flying out, and attacking the invaders on their right wing, compelled them to retreat."

"Isn't that wonderful?" cried Leon. "Where did this army of Paris attack from and when did all this happen?"

"They came across the Ourcq River and attacked the flank of the Germans who were facing

on the Marne. This took place late yesterday, I understand."

"Those must have been the troops I saw, then," said Leon. "Don't you remember I said I saw a large body of soldiers just before we crossed the Ourcq? They looked to me as if they were coming from Paris."

"Probably you're right," Jacques agreed. "Anyway, Paris is saved."

"You said there weren't enough Germans in the world to take it," said Leon.

"I did, and I was right. The last reports, so this man says, were that the German army was on the run. We had their right wing caught between two divisions of our troops. These two divisions began to close in like a pair of scissors ready to cut, and when General von Kluck saw that his army was the thing that was going to be cut, you can be sure he didn't waste any time in getting out of the way of harm."

"Who is General von Kluck?"

"He is in command of the German right wing. It was the route taken by his army that we followed all the way from Belgium."

"Is that so?" exclaimed Leon. "You say he is out of danger now, though?"

"No, I don't think so. He is retreating rapidly and we are pressing him hard on all sides, as I understand it."

"I hope we're in time for some of the fun."

"Ah, but where we are going the German lines are holding, I believe."

"Wait till we get there, though," laughed Leon. "By the way," he continued, "I'd like to send a post card or something to my mother and father in America. I don't suppose I can get such a thing, though."

"I have two. I got them just before we left, one for you and one for me. I also want to send a word to my old parents. We'll just about have time before the train arrives at Bar le Duc to write them."

There was but one pencil and Leon insisted that his comrade should use it first. When Jacques had finished, the train was almost pulling into the station at their destination. Leon wrote, "Am well and happy. Have just learned that I am to be decorated for bravery," and then the train came to a halt. The conductor promised to mail their cards; the men quickly detrained and fell into line with the rest of the troops that had arrived with them.

They were at once marched to camp and were soon settled. No further orders were given at the time and the men prepared for supper.

"Do you remember when we woke up this morning that I said the firing sounded farther away?" remarked Leon, as he and Jacques were

seated on the ground eating their simple but hearty meal.

"Yes, and evidently you were right. The German right wing began to retreat last evening, so by this morning the fighting was some distance further north. At last the Allies have taken the offensive."

"And I hope," exclaimed Leon, "that they won't give it up until the Germans are driven out of France and Belgium. Pretty soon we may be invading Germany and perhaps we'll be in Berlin in a few weeks."

"I'm afraid not," smiled Jacques. "We may be there some day, but I think not in a few weeks. It is my opinion that the fighting will be in France for a long time to come. The Germans will entrench themselves at every point and it will be a big piece of work to drive them out."

"But you think we can do it, don't you?"

"I think we'll win, of course. But I'm not fooling myself into thinking it will be any easy thing to do."

"I wish they'd give us a chance to try it, just the same," said Leon eagerly. "Now that we're back at the front I want to get into action. I don't like this idleness and just sitting around camp."

"You wait a few days," cautioned Jacques. "By that time you'll wish you had a chance to sit

around camp and do nothing. You'll find life in the trenches is no fun after you've had a good taste of it."

"Perhaps that's so," Leon agreed. "The way I feel now, however, is that I want to get right out on the battle line and get down to business."

As he finished speaking a bugle sounded. It was the call to arms and immediately soldiers came hurrying from all directions.

Jacques and Leon were among the first to arrive and were soon in line, awaiting orders. The plan was to relieve the men in the trenches with fresh troops. By working in relays this way it was found that better results were obtained. The soldiers were given a rest between fights and a comparatively fresh body of men was always maintained near the battle line.

It was late in the afternoon now, or rather early evening, and darkness was just beginning to fall. The order to march was given and the troops moved forward. Silently and swiftly they went, every man eager and determined.

An artillery duel was going on between the opposing forces. The firing had slackened somewhat in the last half hour, but this was no sign that the fighting was to be discontinued during the night. In fact, night attacks were favorite devices of both sides. Oftentimes large bodies of troops would steal up under cover of darkness to

a place within a few yards of the opposing trenches. Then, with a last mad rush, they occasionally caught the enemy completely unprepared for their fierce bayonet charges.

Several batteries of heavy guns, concealed under the brow of a hill or by a clump of trees, were passed on the way to the trenches. The firing squads were scorched and blackened by their work, but they were cheerful and waved their hands enthusiastically to their comrades as they passed by on their way to the trenches.

The reënforcements soon arrived at the front and the men who had been there for many hours were ordered to fall back. This they did reluctantly, for although they were well nigh exhausted by their long hours of fighting they were eager to stay and continue it.

"Well, here you are," exclaimed Jacques, as he and Leon took their places. "Is it as nice as you thought it was going to be?"

"The trenches aren't very comfortable, but I wouldn't mind that part of it if there was only something going on. I hate this sitting around."

"So do I, but we can't always have what we want. Something is apt to start at any minute. That is one thing that keeps you alert; you never can tell when we may be attacked or when we ourselves may be ordered to attack."

"What's going on now?" exclaimed Leon.

"What is that officer saying back there? He seems to be making some sort of a speech."

"He wants volunteers to go forward and reconnoiter the enemy's trenches," said Jacques, after listening intently for a moment to what the officer was saying.

"When does he want them to go?"

"Right now."

"Come along, Jacques," exclaimed Leon, springing up. "You and I will go."

"If they'll let us, we will," agreed Jacques, quickly following Leon's example.

They walked quickly to the place where the officer was standing and offered their services. Scores of others also presented themselves, but Leon and Jacques were the first to apply. Every man among the scores of volunteers insisted that he should be the one selected for the dangerous task. The officer smiled proudly as he saw the eagerness of his soldiers.

"I want only three men," he said. "I will take the first three to apply."

Consequently Leon and Jacques were chosen and with them a young Frenchman whom Jacques knew and with whom he had served in Morocco.

"I want you men to find out all you can about what is going on in the German lines," said the officer. "You are not to expose yourselves unnecessarily, but I want all the information I can

get. Find out if they are preparing to advance or fall back, or what; in fact, everything you can."

Without a word the three volunteers turned and started to carry out their dangerous mission. The German trenches were about eight hundred yards, or nearly half a mile, distant, and toward these they made their way.

It was a perilous adventure and none of the three volunteers knew whether or not he would ever return alive. They gave but little thought at the time to this phase of the question, however.

CHAPTER XIX

IN THE ENEMY'S LINES

FORWARD into the dark night the little band went. The battle lines were on the very edge of the Argonne forest and as far as possible the three men took advantage of the cover of the trees.

They moved swiftly at first, when the danger of detection was comparatively slight. Their caution was not relaxed for one moment, however, and great care was observed not to make any noise. In front of them and to their rear shells thrown by the heavy batteries were exploding. The rifle fire of the infantry had practically ceased for the present.

At the distance which separated the two armies the rifle bullets had but slight effect, especially at night. This kind of fighting was reserved for the daylight and particularly for the charges made by the forces of foot soldiers on the opposing trenches.

Thus far most of the attacking had been done by the Germans. They had made a desperate drive to break through the Allied lines in their

dash for Paris. This thrust had been checked, crumpled up and rolled back at the very gates of the city, but this did not mean that the Germans had abandoned their attempts to gain the goal they so much desired.

Time and again the gray-clad troops were hurled at the French and English lines. Until within the last day or two these fierce onslaughts had been frequently successful, though they were attended by frightful losses to the invaders. Out of the distance would come the German hordes in their massed formation, shooting from the hip.

The machine guns and rifles of the Allies would rake their lines from end to end. The Germans fell like nine-pins and yet onward the advancing troops came. The gaps were quickly filled by those behind until by sheer force and weight of numbers they gained ground.

Now, however, the Allies were resisting more successfully and were not only checking the attacks of the enemy, but in some cases were even advancing themselves. The change in the fortunes of war had worked wonders with the French and English troops. In many instances the officers with difficulty held back their men. They seemed intoxicated by their success and were eager to storm the strongest defenses of the enemy, apparently having no concern for their own lives.

Bayonet charges had become of frequent occurrence. At this style of fighting no troops could compare with the Turcos, the black soldiers from the French colonial possessions in Northern Africa. Great brawny, strapping men they were, unacquainted with fear, who liked nothing better than to engage in a hand to hand struggle. Seldom it was that they came off second best and it was rumored that the Germans feared these black warriors more than any forces that faced them.

Some of this new spirit which pervaded the Allied armies had entered the hearts of the three volunteers now cautiously making their way along the edges of the Argonne forest toward the German lines.

It was exciting work. There was always the chance that they might be discovered by the enemy, not only by those in the trenches, but also by a party of men sent out for the same purpose for which they themselves were advancing.

It was thrilling as well as exciting, however. The feeling of danger and the sense of adventure helped the three volunteers to enjoy their mission in spite of the peril which attended them.

When three quarters of the distance had been covered a halt was called and a whispered consultation was held.

"We're within two hundred yards of the Ger-

mans now," whispered Jacques. "What do you think we'd better do?"

"We ought to approach them from the side, I think," said Leon. "It would be out of the question to go right straight ahead, it seems to me."

"That's right," agreed the third member of the party. "They'd see us surely, if we went directly up to them. We wouldn't stand a chance in the world."

"Very well, then," said Jacques, "we'll make a detour from here around through the border of the forest."

"There is a German battery of machine guns at the very end of their line," said the soldier who accompanied the two boys. "We don't want to get in the way of that or it will soon be all over with us. I have often fired one myself and I know the damage they can inflict."

"We'll approach it from the side," said Jacques. "Are you both ready?"

"All ready," replied his two companions.

They were just about to drop on all fours and continue their advance, when Leon suddenly grasped each of his companions by his arm.

"Listen," he whispered excitedly.

All three stood as if they had been all at once transformed into statues. Three pairs of ears strained to catch the faintest sound that might

indicate the presence of danger. At the end of two or three minutes, which seemed like hours to the listeners, Jacques turned to Leon.

"What was it you heard?" he whispered.

"I thought I heard the bushes crackle as if some one was approaching. I guess I must have been mistaken, however."

"I heard nothing," said Jacques. "We'd better proceed."

Before they had a chance to carry out this suggestion, however, a sound was heard by all three that caused them to stop once more. Undoubtedly some one was coming through the forest and whoever it was seemed to care but little as to how much noise he made.

"Drop," whispered Jacques fiercely, and instantly the three scouts threw themselves flat upon the ground and waited.

Nearer and nearer came the sounds. Twigs crackled and snapped while bushes were evidently being thrust aside in the path of the oncomer. To the three young soldiers stretched upon the ground the only explanation which offered itself was that a machine gun was being moved forward. It was hard for them to understand why so little precaution was being taken, however.

It was now too late to run and as they waited, every one of the three scouts vowed to himself

that if he was to die he would die fighting. Three automatic revolvers were held in readiness for the first sign of the enemy.

The noise was not ten feet away now and was coming directly toward the position held by the three young soldiers of France. Suddenly the crackling in the underbrush ceased when it was almost upon them.

"Moo!"

Leon heard Jacques laugh nervously, while on his other side the young French regular exclaimed softly under his breath.

"To be fooled that way by a cow!" whispered Jacques disgustedly.

"Thank heaven it is a cow," exclaimed Leon fervently, feeling somewhat limp.

None of the three made any attempt to talk or to move for some moments. The tension they had been under was very great and the unexpected and sudden ending of the adventure had left them all too weak to do anything.

Finally, Leon spoke. His natural American curiosity and desire to talk could be restrained no longer. "What is a cow doing here?" he inquired in a low voice.

"I don't know," replied Jacques. "She probably belongs to some peasant in the neighborhood who had to desert his home and everything he owned when the country was invaded."

"I should think she'd have been shot and eaten long before this."

"That's what will happen to her soon, all right," said Jacques. "Are we ready to go now?" he continued.

"How about the cow?" asked Leon.

"Leave her where she is," replied Jacques, "we don't want her."

The animal in question was standing near-by, quietly and contentedly chewing her cud and apparently unconscious that a war was going on or that she was in any danger herself. She was as contented as if in her own barnyard.

"Allons," whispered the regular to Jacques, and Leon and all three moved forward again.

Leon had learned enough of the French language to know that the word "allons" meant "come on." In fact, he discovered from time to time that he was able to understand a part of what was spoken around him. Every day he learned new words and new phrases and was better able all the while to make himself intelligible to his French comrades.

The young soldiers now crawled forward, lying prone on their stomachs. The greatest care was taken to maintain absolute silence, for the slightest noise might mean the loss of all three lives. Each man felt in front of him with his hands as he advanced. Every twig and branch and stone

which might hinder progress or cause any sound was carefully removed.

Three abreast they wormed their way forward. Slowly, very slowly, they proceeded, but all were agreed that safety was to be preferred to speed. The old fable of the hare and the tortoise was being illustrated once more. Infinite patience and determination possessed the souls of the three scouts and when these two qualities are combined they are hard to defeat.

Their progress was scarcely perceptible, but still they advanced. Closer and closer they came to the enemy's lines. They had covered a hundred and fifty yards of the last two hundred, and an hour and a half had been consumed in this effort.

Fifty yards ahead of them they could see the spit of a machine gun as it poured its rain of leaden death into the French trenches. This gun was on the extreme left of the German lines and by the flash of the shells a squad of perhaps half a dozen men could be seen in charge.

The three scouts stopped and waited. They watched the sight intently and after a short time had elapsed the firing from this gun ceased. This was the signal for a further advance on the part of the scouts. More rapidly they crawled now, as the Germans had evidently left their gun for a

few moments. This was an opportunity not to be missed.

All three wriggled forward as rapidly as they were able, still taking pains to preserve silence, however. They now bore off to their right more than before in order to approach the trenches from the side, or, if possible, from the rear. Nearer and nearer they came until at length they reached a spot parallel with the German trenches.

Hardly ten yards away stood the machine gun. The Germans had been called away for supper or for a brief time they had relaxed their vigilance. At any rate the gun was unmanned and presented a great temptation to the three young French soldiers.

"We can capture that gun," whispered Jacques.

"I can fire it," replied the young regular. "We can turn it on the Germans and scare the lives out of them."

"All right," agreed Leon. "Let's make a rush for it."

They gathered themselves together for this desperate attempt and a moment later when Jacques gave the signal they sprang to their feet and together made a swift dash for the place where the machine gun was standing.

CHAPTER XX

AN EXCITING NIGHT

DURING the lull in the fighting the Germans had withdrawn a short distance and were eating the soup which composed their principal food. Evidently the fear of a surprise attack was far from their thoughts, and as a consequence they were unprepared for what was about to come.

A dozen strides were sufficient to bring the three daring scouts to the place where the machine gun was standing. Here they were in the midst of the hostile lines, only three men opposed to at least two companies of the enemy.

As yet their presence had not been detected.

"Wheel her!" exclaimed Jacques in a low voice, at the same time grasping the spokes of one wheel in both hands. Leon took the opposite side and their companion the rear, and a moment later the machine gun was no longer pointing toward the French soldiers, but directly at the Germans themselves.

"Hurry!" urged Leon eagerly. "We haven't a second to lose!"

The ammunition for the gun was in a case close

at hand and from this a large quantity of bullets were soon extracted. They were in long strips, like the strips of caps sold for toy pistols, and sooner than it takes to tell about it the bullets were loaded in the gun and all was in readiness for action.

The young regular was in charge and he soon showed that he understood his task. He aimed the machine gun at the group of Germans who were nearest, and could be faintly seen through the darkness. Then he opened fire on them.

"Let 'em have it!" cried Leon, as a rain of bullets poured forth upon the luckless Germans. A steady stream of fire and lead belched from the mouth of the gun as Jacques and his companion swept the enemy's lines.

"They're on the run," shouted Leon. "At least those that are left are running."

Evidently the Germans were demoralized. So unexpected an attack and from such close quarters had surprised them and thrown them into disorder. Confusion reigned on all sides.

"Keep it up! Keep it up!" cried Leon, dancing up and down in his excitement. "Point it down the trenches here! Give them all a taste of it!"

His suggestion was quickly followed. The murderous fire of the machine gun raked the trenches and soon cleared them of any Germans that might

have remained there. Thus far not a shot had been fired at the three young scouts. The Germans were in full retreat and their retreat was fast becoming a rout. They undoubtedly supposed that a large force of the French had attacked them, and so completely had they been taken by surprise that they did not wait to find out the truth.

As they broke and ran for their lives a powerful searchlight from the French lines was flashed upon them and the French batteries at that moment also opened fire. Charge after charge of grapeshot was hurled into the huddled and confused masses of the Germans. The effect of this was deadly and the ranks of the enemy were riddled and torn from end to end.

The French had evidently been waiting for some sign of activity on the part of their scouts and no time was lost in taking advantage of the daring effort of the three young soldiers.

"Give 'em some more!" cried Leon. "Shoot where the searchlight is playing."

"Give us some more ammunition!" shouted Jacques, with difficulty making himself heard above the noise of the firing.

"I certainly will!" responded Leon, and he quickly emptied the case of all that it held. "Shoot it all at them," he urged, "and be quick about it! They're leaving us pretty rapidly and

they'll soon be where we can't take a shot at them."

This was indeed true. The Germans were fleeing in riotous haste, every man for himself; and in their mad flight they left everything that might hinder their movements in any way. Another machine gun some fifty yards distant was abandoned; ammunition was disregarded and the ground was littered with rifles thrown away.

"They've almost gone," announced Leon, as the powerful searchlight swept the ground where the Germans lately had been entrenched.

"It's a good thing they have," gasped Jacques. "The barrel of this gun is so hot it would melt if we fired much more."

"We don't need any more," cried Leon. "We chased the whole crowd of them away. Here come our troops," he announced.

Sure enough, several companies of French infantry were advancing on the run and soon came to the captured trenches. They cheered loudly as they realized what had taken place. Not a German was to be seen; they all had been put to flight by three soldiers. The daring effort of the three scouts had been a complete success.

"Get that other machine gun!" shouted Jacques.

"They'll get it, all right," exclaimed Leon. "Don't worry about that."

The French soldiers immediately took possession of the abandoned trenches so that their lines in this place were moved forward nearly a half mile. Not often did it happen that a gain of such magnitude was made without great loss of life on the part of the assailants. In order to capture intrenched positions it is usually necessary to attack with a force at least four or five times as large as that of the defenders.

The three young soldiers were soon the center of a joyous group who slapped them on their backs and cheered them and applauded their splendid achievement. The young lieutenant who had sent them forward was among the first to congratulate them.

"You did wonderfully, marvelously!" he exclaimed, shaking hands with all three of the young men in turn. "I cannot tell you how proud I am of you! You shall all be recommended for the medal."

Jacques and Leon and their companion were greatly embarrassed at all this display which was being made over them. They had not realized what a brave deed they had done. They had started out to do as they had been ordered, and had seen a chance to go a little bit farther. They had seized this opportunity and had been successful. That was all. The thought that they were doing any very brave or heroic act had not oc-

curred to them until their comrades began to heap praises upon them.

"Let's get out of this," whispered Leon to Jacques at the first opportunity.

"That's what I say," replied Jacques, and quietly and unobserved the two young soldiers took their places in the trenches.

"We're heroes, did you know that?" said Leon a few moments later.

"So it seems," laughed Jacques. "I don't like it, do you?"

"No, I don't; but I'm glad of one thing."

"That we are to be recommended for the medal again? With two recommendations we ought to get at least one medal. I want one badly."

"No more than I do, and I only hope we don't get killed before we have a chance to wear them."

"We always stand a good chance of that, I suppose."

"We certainly do, and I don't think we'll have to wait long for an opportunity."

"What do you mean by that?" exclaimed Leon.

"Just wait and see. I don't believe the Germans are going to give up these trenches without more of a fight. Their one idea is to get ahead, and unless I'm very much mistaken we'll see them back here shortly."

"Do you think they'll come to-night?"

"I don't know when they'll come, but it will be

before to-morrow night, I am almost sure. That's only my opinion, of course," said Jacques.

"Well, if they do retake the trenches," exclaimed Leon, "they'll have more trouble doing it than we did in capturing them in the first place."

"No trenches were ever taken as easily as these," laughed Jacques. "Wasn't it wonderful the way we fooled those Germans?"

"I told you there'd be some action as soon as we got back at the front."

"You mustn't get conceited, Leon," cautioned Jacques.

"No fear of that. My head is not swelled; I'm only glad to think of how we happened to be able to do what we did. I consider it luck more than anything else. This is only another proof of how lucky we are."

"It is, indeed," Jacques assented. "We'll also be lucky if we don't catch pneumonia or something like that in these trenches."

"They are pretty damp, aren't they?"

"I should say they are. Are you as glad to be in them as you thought you'd be?"

"Just exactly," exclaimed Leon cheerfully. "I don't mind a few small discomforts. When you're in the army, you know, you must remember that it is not all brass buttons and dress parade."

"Well, I guess not," agreed Jacques earnestly.

"At least not in war time. Have you seen many brass buttons or dress parades since you've been in the army?"

"I saw some buttons and some parades. They weren't dress parades, though, and I fancy that the men in them weren't thinking much of how they looked."

"Most of them were wondering how they were going to feel and act when the bullets of the enemy began to whizz past their ears, I imagine," said Jacques grimly. "I'd almost rather face bullets than sit in this damp trench, though."

"Let me show you how to do it," exclaimed Leon.

"What are you going to do?" inquired Jacques curiously.

"Get some of that straw first," Leon directed.

The trenches were more or less covered with straw. The side facing toward the enemy was in this condition, at any rate. Consequently, when the men stood up to fire they rested their arms in the dry straw, which also afforded them considerable protection from the German sharpshooters.

As Jacques reached for some of this straw, Leon divested himself of his knapsack and placed it on the bottom of the trench. All about it he placed the straw that Jacques handed him. In a few moments he had a dry seat and a warm place in which he could rest his feet.

"That's a fine idea," exclaimed Jacques enthusiastically, and in a few moments he had followed Leon's example and was warmly and comfortably quartered.

"Oh, yes," laughed Leon. "I have a wonderful brain."

"Just the same, all the men are copying you," said Jacques; and sure enough, in both directions through the trenches the soldiers were using their knapsacks and the straw to make seats and dry foot space for themselves.

"It certainly is more comfortable, isn't it?" said Leon. "Now I feel as if I can pass the night fairly comfortably."

"You mean what is left of the night. It will be dawn in about two hours."

"And at dawn the Germans will attack."

"I think you're right," Jacques agreed. "Shall we try to get a little sleep?"

"It would be a good plan, I think. I wonder what chance there is of our being able to do it?"

"No chance at all," exclaimed Jacques at the end of about twenty minutes. "I can't sleep in a place like this and at such a time."

"Nor I," said Leon. "Let's stand up and stretch ourselves and see if we can see what is going on."

Both boys stood up, but it was impossible for them to see anything in the darkness. Jacques

engaged in conversation with the soldier nearest him, and though Leon could understand but little of what was said, he listened attentively. He had determined to improve his every opportunity to learn French. Since he had been in Europe and in the war, and seen all the wonderful things there were to see and had heard about all the things that were going on, he had decided that it was impossible to know too much. Consequently, he resolved not only to learn French, but to take an interest in other things as well. One can never tell when knowledge may be useful or even when it may save a life.

"We have been reënforced," said Jacques at length, turning to Leon. "This man here says the officers evidently expect an attack and that a large force has been brought up to aid us."

The two young soldiers stood in the trenches and discussed the possibilities of an attack and what would be done in the event of such a thing happening. They made up maneuvers and told how they would act in like circumstances were they in command of the troops. The night passed quickly in this way and almost before they were aware of it the first streaks of light began to appear in the eastern sky.

Before long it was possible to distinguish objects at a distance, and now several men with spy-glasses were stationed on the edge of the trenches.

They swept the country in all directions, especially the district through which the Germans had fled in their mad rout the preceding night. From behind the French lines an aëroplane rose and soared swiftly away to discover the position and strength of the enemy.

"You look nervous," remarked Jacques to Leon, whose hand shook as he reached for one of the cups of coffee being now served the soldiers.

"I am nervous," replied Leon. "I'm not frightened, though."

As he spoke one of the men with a spyglass suddenly jumped to his feet.

"Here they come!" he shouted.

CHAPTER XXI

THE INVADERS ATTACK

INSTANTLY every one was alert. All through the long lines of trenches the soldiers sprang to their feet, prepared for immediate action. Needless to say, Leon and Jacques were among the first to be in their places.

"Can you see anything?" inquired Leon eagerly.

"Not a thing."

"Perhaps this man was mistaken."

"I guess not," said Jacques confidently. "He had glasses, you know, and he was higher than we are. He could see them long before we could, even if he had no glasses to help him. They're coming, all right."

"That looks like it!" exclaimed Leon, as a shell shrieked over their heads and burst some distance behind the French lines.

"Yes, and there is our reply to it," said Jacques.

The French artillery had opened fire. The roar of the cannonading became louder and louder as the firing became more frequent. Shells from the

German guns were bursting both in front and in the rear of the French trenches. So far, however, the damage they had done was slight.

"Those are the 'Jack Johnsons' they are using," said Jacques.

"What do you mean?"

"Those big German howitzers. Don't you remember how the English soldiers at Mons christened them that?"

"Sure enough," exclaimed Leon. "They aren't doing much damage to us yet, though, are they?"

"No, but wait a few moments."

The soldier next to Jacques plucked him by the sleeve and engaged him in conversation while a grin of delight spread over his face. Jacques, too, broke into a smile as he listened to his neighbor's words.

"Did you hear that?" he asked, turning to Leon.

"I didn't hear a thing you said."

"This man says that our gunners are writing, 'Love to the Kaiser,' and 'Regards from the Allies,' on the shells they are firing at the Germans."

"That's pretty good," laughed Leon. "I only hope the Kaiser will receive the message."

"No fear of that. You may be sure he is in

some good safe place, where the enemy's shells won't bother him."

"I wish he was in that crowd that is attacking us."

"So do I. Can you see them yet?"

Leon stood on tiptoe and peered intently in the direction from which the Germans had been sighted. As the sun rose higher, the early morning mists were burned away and it was now possible to see a long distance.

"I see them!" cried Leon suddenly. "Look!" and as he spoke he pointed straight ahead of him.

"I don't see a thing."

"There!" exclaimed Leon. "Don't you see something moving 'way off there?"

"Those long gray lines, you mean?"

"Yes. Those are the Germans."

"You're right," said Jacques suddenly. "I saw that line before, but I didn't think it could be the soldiers. It looks just like part of the landscape."

"It is hard to see them," agreed Leon. "Until I saw them moving I thought they were a hedge or something like that, too. At this time of day they are especially hard to see."

"Those are wonderful uniforms," said Jacques. "Think how much better they are than these baggy red trousers the French troops have to

wear. Our uniforms make us a perfect mark for the enemy's guns."

"Yes, but I have heard they were going to be changed."

"They ought to be," insisted Jacques. "Just because our soldiers have worn these same uniforms for so many years they hate to give them up. It is all absolute nonsense."

"Too late to change them before this battle," laughed Leon. "Look!" he added, as he glanced at the sky above them. "That aëroplane we sent up must be directly over the German lines. See, it has changed its course and is now flying parallel to us."

"They're being fired at, too. You can see shells bursting around it."

"They're down fairly low," remarked Leon. "I'm glad you and I are not in that machine, aren't you?"

"I certainly am. I know how they must feel, though. Do you remember how we felt when we were being fired at on the Marne?"

"I shall never forget it."

"They're hit!" cried Jacques suddenly. "Look at them! They're falling!"

"That is horrible," shuddered Leon, as he gazed spellbound and with wide open eyes at the falling aëroplane. Evidently it had been struck by a bullet or the fragment of a bursting shell. It had

suddenly pitched forward and then plunged headlong toward the earth in its mad descent. Half the distance from the ground it caught fire and a roaring mass of flames dashed downward to destruction.

"Two more good men gone," sighed Leon. "Who was the aviator, Jacques?"

"I don't know. He did his duty, anyway, for he stayed over the German troops long enough to give our gunners the range."

"We paid a big price for the information, I should say."

"Not very," remarked Jacques. "In a war like this the lives of two men aren't worth a very great deal. Not that I think that lives are to be wasted by any means."

"The Germans waste them."

"They do seem to. I don't believe you'll ever find General Joffre doing such a thing, however."

"I hope he'll not."

The two young soldiers talked on while the long line of gray-clad Germans advanced upon them slowly and yet steadily. They were still a long distance away, too great a distance to be a mark for rifle bullets. The artillery roared and crashed continuously, however, and evidently the French were doing considerable damage with their big guns. Even with the naked eye it was now possible to see shells explode in the ranks of the

enemy. A gap would appear, only to be filled almost immediately by those in the rear.

"How many of them are there, do you think?" exclaimed Leon.

"About five or six regiments, I should say."

"That means about six or seven thousand men, then."

"About that many, yes."

"How many have we here?"

"I don't know," replied Jacques. "Not over four thousand."

"Can we hold them?"

"Certainly, we can. It will take more than the men they have there to take these trenches away from us now. The ones who are attacking are always at a disadvantage and need many more men. You must remember that they can't even see us yet, while they are in plain sight. They'll undoubtedly charge us and then you'll see them go down like nine-pins when we open up. It's going to be terrible, and we'll have to fight like demons."

"We'll do that, all right," said Leon. "Just look at these men around us."

The French troops in the trenches were almost beside themselves with excitement. Their hands twitched nervously and as they peered forth upon the mass of advancing Germans it was evident that many were restraining themselves with diffi-

culty from jumping out of the trenches and rushing forward to meet the oncoming host.

"Yes," said Jacques. "I guess you're right; these men will fight like demons. If you were fighting for your home and your country, I guess you would, too."

"I expect to fight my best," said Leon stoutly.

"I know you do," exclaimed Jacques. "I don't want you to think for a moment that I doubted that fact. I was just thinking of these Frenchmen here whose country is invaded and is already scarred horribly by this war."

"Well, it's better to win at the end than at the beginning," said Leon. "The Germans are doing their best now, while we will be stronger every day."

"That is true," agreed Jacques. "At the same time I wish we had been more prepared for this war. We'll win in the end, all right, but if we could win at the beginning, too, that would make the end come quicker."

"We'll do our part in this fight," exclaimed Leon. "I think we're going to be ordered to fire in a moment."

All along the line sounded the click of the hammers as the rifles were cocked. Every man set himself a little more firmly in his place. Every one gripped his rifle a little more tightly and

grimly prepared himself for the struggle which was about to come.

In close formation the Germans advanced. They were shouting and singing as they came on and above the roar of the big guns the sound of the men's voices made its way.

"I wish they wouldn't sing," exclaimed Leon. "It seems too horrible."

"Ssh," hissed Jacques. "Keep your eyes on the captain there."

"Ready," shouted the officer. "Aim! Fire!"

The sharp bark of hundreds of rifles now added to the ever increasing din. Fast and furious became the fighting. The men in the trenches worked feverishly to load and fire their guns as rapidly as possible.

The Germans fell in scores, but their advance did not slacken for a moment. On they came, cheering wildly. The places of the fallen were instantly taken by their fellows, so that the front rank always remained intact. The French machine guns and mitrailleuses now opened fire and the havoc they wrought was beyond description.

It was as if some man with a scythe was cutting weeds in his gardens. Entire rows of the Germans were cut down and plunged headlong to the earth. The bravery of the attackers was marvelous for they did not once falter. On, on, on they came like a great gray-green wave that had

just broken and was curling onward toward the beach.

Leon and Jacques were working desperately. The officers were exhorting their men to even greater efforts, though every one already was doing his utmost and needed no urging. So fast were the men loading and firing that before many minutes had passed the ammunition began to run low.

The rifle-firing ceased to a certain extent, but the artillery, and especially the rapid firers, kept a steady rain of lead pouring into the German ranks.

"We're checking them! They're breaking up!" exclaimed Leon.

On his right the soldier who had stood shoulder to shoulder with him had sunk forward and Leon suddenly perceived that the man was dead. He was half propped up in the trench, his head lying on his outstretched arms. Shocked as he was by this discovery, Leon quickly recovered his composure. So intent was he on the battle now raging that anything else could have but small effect on him.

"Yes, sir," cried Jacques, "we are stopping them. We'll send 'em back in a moment more, too."

Both boys began to cheer, and their comrades, catching a spark of their enthusiasm, also broke

into a shout. This proceeding seemed to disconcert the Germans almost more than did the bullets. They had received terrible punishment as they pushed forward, but they were able to take all that and still advance, for they believed that they could drive out the French and they were prepared for heavy losses. When the cheer from the trenches reached them over the blood-stained battlefield, however, they wavered.

For the first time the Germans hesitated. Their front rank almost seemed to stop. The troops in the rear consequently were checked and before many minutes the attackers were gathered in a great dense mass, apparently undecided whether to advance or to retreat.

The non-commissioned officers shouted and waved their swords. They exhorted their men to go forward and they even struck some of the soldiers with the flat of their swords to urge them onward. These efforts were in vain, however. The Germans had suddenly lost confidence and become demoralized.

Like any other machine, they ran well until something went wrong. Something had suddenly gone wrong with this section of the German war machine, and like a pack of sheep the men huddled closely together on the field, an easy mark for the hail of bullets poured into their midst from the French trenches.

"They're beaten! They're beaten!" shouted Leon excitedly.

"No doubt of it," exclaimed Jacques. "We've got them now."

"Look there!"

The French officers were shouting to their men and running up and down behind the trenches.

"It's the order to charge," cried Leon.

CHAPTER XXII

THE CHARGE

OUT of the trenches swarmed the French troops. Their opportunity had come and they were fully aware of it. Now was the time to strike and every man was eager to take advantage of the moment.

Leon looked about him as he clambered out of his place and took his stand upon the field of battle. His companions were like wild men. The fire of battle and of victory was in their eyes and they acted like blooded dogs straining at the leash. Their enemies were demoralized, on the verge of rout, and every soldier of France was impatient to hasten that rout and to have a share in accomplishing it.

The long cruel bayonets gleamed in the rays of the morning sunlight as the men quickly formed and awaited the order to advance. Leon could not help shuddering, in spite of himself, as he thought of the frightful damage that could be done by those slim blades of cold steel.

It was to be man against man now, however,

and the young soldier had no intention of dealing gently with his opponents. The smoke of battle filled his nostrils, while his ears thrummed with the roar of the big guns. His fighting spirit was aroused and he found himself almost as eager as his companions for the word to advance.

To Leon it seemed as if hours passed before this order came. In reality only a few seconds had elapsed, but at such a time a whole lifetime sometimes seems to be crowded into a few short moments.

Now they were off! Leon and Jacques found themselves in the midst of a yelling crowd of frenzied Frenchmen, every man intent on dealing out death and destruction to the Germans on the field before them. The noise was almost deafening. The great guns of the Allies sent a constant stream of shot and shell into the opposing ranks in an effort to aid the charge.

Nor were the Germans idle. Their officers had partly succeeded in rallying their men and they evidently intended to make a stand. Their guns were turned upon the mass of onrushing Frenchmen and the execution they wrought was deadly. Men fell by scores, but the advancing lines did not stop. On they went, cheering as before, one fixed purpose in the minds of all.

"My men would have stormed the rock of Gibraltar that day," said their commander proudly,

a week later when he was recounting the story to a group of officers.

Nearer and nearer to the Germans they came. Leon now could see the white, set faces of his opponents. He wondered vaguely if he would ever live to reach that mass of grim men waiting there for him. All about him his companions were dropping. The rain of bullets poured into their midst was causing untold havoc. It hardly seemed possible that any one would be left alive.

The Germans were wavering, however. Excited as he was, Leon could see that plainly. It is one thing to face rifles that you cannot see. It is a different proposition, however, to watch long rows of men rush toward you, every man with a shining steel bayonet in his hands. In the one case you can't see the threatening death, but in the other it is before your eyes every second and it requires a strong man to wait coolly for its arrival.

The Germans hesitated. They appeared undecided as to what next to do. And then, when they realized that nothing they had done had produced any marked effect upon the Allies and that nothing they could do would stop them, their lines wavered and then broke.

In vain their officers pleaded and threatened. Demoralization had set in and no power on earth

could rally them now. The Germans turned and fled.

"They're running! They're running!" shouted Leon and Jacques, both wild with excitement.

A great cheer broke from the French ranks, and waving their rifles on high the men increased their speed. They were almost upon the fleeing Germans now. Artillery, rifles, anything that would retard their flight was thrown aside as the defeated soldiers ran for their lives.

But the French were soon among them shooting, striking in all directions and on every side. They were revenging themselves for their burned homes, their battle-scarred countryside, and their slain fathers, brothers, and sons. Revenge was sweet to these men and they made the very most of it.

The German regiments were literally cut to pieces. The field was strewn with the bodies of the dead and dying. Hundreds lay about on all sides. Many threw up their hands in token of surrender and these alone were unharmed and quickly made prisoners.

The Germans scattered and fled at their utmost speed, safety being the uppermost thought in the mind of every one. The French pursued them relentlessly and almost gleefully, rejoicing in their victory and desperately trying to make it as decisive as possible.

Leon and Jacques found themselves side by side and unharmed when at last the fighting was over. The German line had been completely routed and aside from the dead and wounded left behind not one remained on the battle field. Here and there in the distance a squad of Frenchmen still could be seen in pursuit of one of their foes, but otherwise the struggle was all ended. The French were left in undisputed possession of the ground.

"What a fight!" exclaimed Leon, mopping his brow.

"What a success it was!" said Jacques enthusiastically. "My only regret is that I didn't reach this spot before the Germans left it. I'd like to have been able to strike a few blows at them myself."

"It would have been necessary for us to run much faster than we did to get here in time for that," laughed Leon. "They didn't wait very long."

"I should say not. We took a lot of prisoners though."

"Yes, we did," agreed Leon. "Look at them over there. Evidently some of the Germans waited here at any rate. Not because they wished to, though."

"And the prisoners are not the only ones who remained either," said Jacques grimly. "Look at the ground out there."

"It is awful!" shuddered Leon. "Doesn't it seem a shame that fine, brave men like that have to be killed or wounded or perhaps maimed for life? And they didn't start the war themselves you know."

"You're not getting soft hearted, are you?"

"Not a bit."

"Do you feel sorry for the Germans who were killed and wounded?"

"Of course I do. Why shouldn't I?"

"They are our enemies."

"Perhaps they are," said Leon. "At the same time they are brave men and I feel sorry for them. That doesn't mean I don't intend to fight against them, just as hard as ever. But these men out here I have no grudge against and I feel sorry for any man who is suffering."

"You are an American, that's why you sympathize with these men," said Jacques. "If you were French or Belgian or British you'd feel differently."

"Perhaps. Still I hate to see any one suffer and so do you, too."

"Not these men."

"Yes, you do, or you're different from the rest of your countrymen."

"What do you mean?"

"Look out there," directed Leon. "Our troops are caring for the wounded and they are taking

just as good care of the Germans as they are of their own men."

"Perhaps you're right," agreed Jacques, after a moment spent in watching the acts of mercy being performed on the battle-scarred field. "Let's go and see what we can do to help."

"That's the way," cried Leon. "I've always said that Frenchmen were good sports and now I know it."

The two young soldiers were soon busily engaged in assisting in caring for the wounded and in carrying them to the motor-ambulances that were now making their appearance. As fast as one was filled it bore its load to the nearest hospital, deposited it there and returned for more. The work progressed rapidly. Soon the wounded were all removed and the dead had been buried in shallow graves. The chaplain said a few words over their bodies, then the earth was piled on top of them and the war was over, as far as they were concerned.

"I don't believe I could stand all these sights if I wasn't pretty well hardened to them now," said Leon.

"They are pretty bad," agreed Jacques.

"Not so bad when the fight is on. You don't notice such things then for you are too excited. But when it is all over, you realize just how awful it all is."

"We mustn't think about that part of it. Let's try to forget the bad things and see if we can't plan some new scheme for beating the Germans again."

"Do you think they'll be back?"

"I know they will. We beat them easily that time because they happened to become demoralized, but that isn't apt to happen again."

"They won't be here right away, though," said Leon. "It'll take them some time to reform their lines and get reënforcements enough to attack us again."

"Don't be too sure."

The two boys were now put to work along with several hundred other soldiers digging new trenches. This was hard work and not of the sort enjoyed by many of the men. It was very important work though and had to be done as rapidly as possible.

After two successful engagements the Allied lines had made a gain of nearly a mile that day, and in order to hold this advantage it was necessary to entrench strongly. Every man was equipped with a long handled shovel and was set to digging.

To the two boys this was a new kind of labor and one which called into play muscles long unused. Before many minutes had elapsed their arms were aching and their backs were sore.

"I don't like this," said Leon.

"Nor I," admitted Jacques. "This is part of the game though, and I guess we'll keep on digging whether we like it or not."

"Yes, I imagine we shall," smiled Leon, as he turned to his task with redoubled zeal. Even the brief time that he had been a soldier had instilled the idea in his head that he was to do exactly what he was told. The idea of questioning his orders almost made him laugh now, it was so ridiculous. At first this unquestioning obedience had been hard for the young American but he had become so accustomed to it by this time that it was almost second nature to him.

They dug on in silence for some time. The trenches were almost finished now and the main French force was preparing to occupy them. The trenches were placed on the tops of three small hills with a little valley between them. From their places on top, the French could command the approach to this small valley and make it decidedly uncomfortable for any force that might try to enter it.

"I'm glad that job is over," exclaimed Jacques sometime later, when he and Leon were resting in the newly completed trenches.

"So am I," said Leon. "I'm tired, too."

"I wish they'd give us an aëroplane and send us scouting, don't you?"

"We might get what those two men got this morning."

"I guess not. We're lucky, you know," laughed Jacques.

"Don't I hear an aëroplane now?" exclaimed Leon, straightening up.

"You certainly do. Here it comes too."

Over their heads flew one of the French army monoplanes evidently sent to find out what the Germans in the vicinity were planning to do. No one thought for a moment that because they had sustained a reverse the Germans would stop trying. In fact they were only expected to redouble their efforts on that account. As a matter of fact their defeat was only a slight one anyway, when measured by some of the other battles of the great war. In the reports it would probably be put down as a severe skirmish.

"They'll get lost in the fog," said Leon.

"Fog," exclaimed Jacques. "Where is any fog?"

"Just look out over that field and you'll see it. Why it is rising right up out of the ground."

"I wish we would have fog."

"Why do you wish that?"

"Because I have a scheme," said Jacques mysteriously. "My father has often told me of something they did in the fog during the Franco-Prussian War in 1870. I'd like to try it myself."

"Can you do it alone?"

"I should say not. It would take about all the men that are here."

"How are you going to work it then?"

"I'd have to suggest it to one of the officers and get him to try it."

"That would be pretty hard, I should think," said Leon.

"I'm afraid so, but there is never any harm in trying."

"Tell me what it is anyway," urged Leon.

"Not at all," smiled Jacques. "If the fog closes in I'll tell you, but not otherwise."

CHAPTER XXIII

JACQUES' SCHEME

IN spite of Leon's entreaties Jacques would not consent to disclose the nature of his scheme. "If the fog closes in very thick I'll tell you," was his answer to every question of his friend.

"I don't see your point in not telling me," Leon insisted.

"There is no point at all," replied Jacques. "It is a wild scheme and you'd probably think I was crazy. I want to submit it to our commander first and if he is agreeable to trying it, you'll know soon enough."

"But I want to know now."

"You're the most persistent person I've ever seen," laughed Jacques. "I warn you once and for all, however, that I shall not tell you what it is unless the fog becomes much denser and unless our commander thinks well of it."

"The fog is much thicker already," exclaimed Leon, jumping to his feet and looking about him.

"Not thick enough, though."

"I'll stick this bayonet into you," threatened Leon, pretending to reach for his gun.

"You can't even scare me that way," laughed Jacques. "Here comes some food for us anyway, so let's declare an armistice until after luncheon."

"All right," Leon agreed. "No longer than that, though."

The coarse plain fare was handed out to the soldiers who did not leave their places in the trenches. Every man was hungry however, for it had been a hard day and the soldiers had worked valiantly.

"The best meal I ever ate," announced Leon, as he drank his soup and munched the large chunk of black bread which was his portion.

"It is pretty good, isn't it?" said Jacques. "I didn't realize how hungry I was until I began to eat. I think I could eat forever."

"I doubt that," said Leon, laughing. "I know I couldn't anyway. This food they give us seems to me to be very filling."

"It's wholesome too, you may be sure of that."

"Well, I haven't complained of the cooking yet. So far I am very well satisfied with the board I am getting."

"You are perfectly suited with this hotel, are you?" Jacques inquired.

"Yes, I am. That is there is only one thing I want."

"My dear sir," exclaimed Jacques, pretending great politeness. "Tell me what it is you wish and I shall be only too happy to accommodate you if it is in my power to do so."

"Do you mean that?"

"Of course I do."

"Very well, then," said Leon quickly. "Tell me what your scheme is."

"I said if it was in my power to do so I would accommodate you."

"That is in your power."

"Let me see," said Jacques, standing up and looking about him. "The fog is closing in thicker every minute, isn't it?"

"It certainly is," Leon agreed.

"Perhaps the time has come then."

Before Leon could restrain him Jacques sprang from his place in the trench and made his way quickly to the spot where one of the petty officers was standing. He saluted, spoke a few words to the officer in a low voice who thereupon nodded his head, and Jacques soon disappeared in the fast gathering mist.

Leon did not know what to make of his friend's peculiar actions. He stood and watched him for several moments until he was out of sight and then resumed his place in the trenches once more, completely mystified. As he sat down the whirr of propellers over his head made him look up in

time to see the scout aëroplane, which had been sent out some time before, returning.

"Coming back before they get lost in the fog," thought Leon.

He had no idea of what Jacques had been hinting at, and he was very curious to know just what was in the mind of the young Frenchman. It was not like Jacques to conceal things in this way. Perhaps it was a silly scheme after all and he did not disclose it for fear of being laughed at. Still, thought Leon, he had rushed off to tell it to their commander so that he could not have considered it such a very foolish idea in spite of his remarks.

While Leon was revolving these many thoughts in his mind Jacques suddenly reappeared.

"It's all right," he announced.

"What's all right?" demanded Leon.

"My scheme. I have received not only permission, but an order to try it."

"Tell me what it is."

"I haven't time now. Come along. They're waiting for us."

More puzzled than ever Leon followed his companion. The fog was now so dense that it was almost impossible to recognize figures at a distance of more than thirty or forty feet.

Jacques evidently knew just where he wanted to go however, and the two young soldiers soon

arrived at their destination. This proved to be the headquarters of their commander. Here was gathered quite a large company of soldiers, at least a hundred, Leon thought. In the thick mist the men appeared almost like ghosts and it was impossible to estimate accurately just how many there were.

Every man was furnished with a small hatchet, and the word was soon given to march. Leon had remained close beside Jacques all the time, but thus far he had had no chance to question him, and their mission still remained a deep mystery to him.

They moved slowly forward, marching past their trenches down the hill and on into the small valley. They did not stop here, however, but kept on until they reached a large field, nearly a half mile beyond their lines. "There's a German regiment about a mile from here," said Jacques finally.

"How do you know?" exclaimed Leon.

"When I was at headquarters that aviator we saw start out a while ago arrived. He reported one of the Baden regiments resting on their arms about a mile and a half away."

"What are we going to do?"

"We're after that regiment."

"With axes?" exclaimed Leon. "Was that your scheme?"

"You'll see in a moment."

The boys had been conversing in low tones as they walked along, and as Jacques ceased speaking the order came to halt.

The company halted and several of the men were sent to reconnoiter the surrounding country. The rest of the soldiers awaited their return in silence.

"What's up?" whispered Leon.

"Ssh," Jacques cautioned. "I can't tell you now."

No further words were spoken and silence reigned throughout the whole body of men. Most of them were in the same predicament as Leon; they did not know why they were there or what they were expected to do. An air of mystery pervaded the proceedings and if the others were of the same mind as the young American boy they certainly were burning with curiosity.

The figures of their companions appeared dim and shadowy in the dense fog that drifted in and covered everything with its damp folds. An air of tense excitement pervaded the men which the thick mist and the mystery of their expedition only served to increase.

Suddenly a stir was felt all along the line. Some one was coming and it proved to be the scouting party returning. Its leader made his

report to the commanding officer who turned and addressed a few curt orders to his men.

The soldiers immediately broke ranks and scattered in all directions, while Jacques translated the orders to Leon. All the young American had understood was some word about a tree.

"We are each to cut three saplings between five and six feet high," he said.

"Fire-wood to cook dinner with, I suppose," remarked Leon.

"Don't be sarcastic."

"I can't help it. I don't like this business of not knowing what I am doing. Everything is so secret it makes me mad."

"Don't forget this, Leon," said Jacques quietly. "A soldier's duty is to obey his orders and nothing else. Suppose it was necessary to explain every move that was made to all the troops. Wouldn't that be a nice state of affairs?"

"That's all right, too, but you wouldn't tell me what you had in mind and you're not an officer. At least not yet."

"I didn't feel sure that I had any right to tell you," exclaimed Jacques. "You know I'd tell you anything if I thought it was all right to do so."

"Don't you trust me?"

"Of course I do. Please don't say such a

thing, and you know as well as I do that that was not the reason why I kept silent."

"I guess I was wrong," said Leon soberly. "It's really none of my business what we are going to do, and I won't make another mistake."

"I don't want you to have any hard feelings toward me," said Jacques.

"You know I haven't any, and never shall have," exclaimed Leon impetuously. "The whole thing was my fault and I had forgotten that part of what a soldier's duty is until you reminded me of it just now. I am much obliged to you for telling me, too, and I trust I've learned my lesson. I'm glad you told me what you did, for if you hadn't some one else would and he wouldn't be as nice about it either."

"Here are the saplings," exclaimed Jacques suddenly.

"Three apiece you said, didn't you?" remarked Leon as he set to work.

"Yes, three, and we are to be as quiet as possible while we are working too."

Both boys immediately set to work at their task. Leon felt ashamed of himself in the face of the quiet rebuke his comrade had administered and he made up his mind that never again would he forget himself as he had that day. He realized that curiosity as to orders was not a part of

a good soldier's makeup and from now on he was determined to be a good soldier.

In a very few moments both young boys had cut their allotment of saplings. They were ready to return.

"You'll see something interesting now," remarked Jacques as they made their way back to the place where the rest of their company was waiting.

This was indeed true. When they arrived at their destination every man was busy driving his sapling into the ground. The branches had been trimmed from them and one end sharpened. This was driven into the ground a few inches, so that it stood solidly.

"About ten feet apart," suggested Jacques.

"The stakes, you mean?" asked Leon.

"Yes. Drive them in so they'll stand firmly."

Puzzled as he was, Leon made no remark but did as he was told. When his three stakes had been planted he and Jacques joined the rest of their company which now was forming some little distance away. When every man was back in his place, a half dozen soldiers with huge bags started out along the many stakes standing all about them.

"Watch these fellows," whispered Jacques.

They went rapidly from one stake to another

and taking soldiers' caps from the bags they carried they placed one on the top of each stake. In a very few moments every stake was adorned with one of these pieces of headgear.

"Why," exclaimed Leon. "In this fog they look like soldiers."

"That's what they're supposed to look like," said Jacques eagerly. "Do you really think any one would be fooled by them?"

"I don't see why not."

"Well, they'll look still more like soldiers in a little while," went on Jacques. "There will be some boughs hung on the stakes to make them look fatter."

"I'm beginning to see your scheme," said Leon quietly.

"Of course you are. By this time there is a large force of our troops on each side of us and one from the direction in which we came."

"And we're to lure the Germans into a trap here, I suppose."

"Exactly. If we can get that Baden regiment to chase us and lead them back here, there'll be some action, I can tell you."

"This was all your scheme, too," exclaimed Leon, looking at his companion in admiration. "You're a wonder, Jacques."

"Wait and see. The scheme hasn't been successful yet and anyway it wasn't my scheme. I

told you my father was with a regiment that did exactly the same thing in the Franco-Prussian War."

A sharp order put an end to all further conversation between the two young soldiers. The command to march had been given and the company immediately moved.

"We're going to try to lure the Germans on now," exclaimed Jacques, in a low voice. "Let's hope we have good luck."

"We always have that."

As they made their way cautiously forward into the fog, the two boys looked behind them. The field of sticks, every one adorned with a cap, certainly presented the appearance of a body of troops, and as Leon and Jacques saw them through the fog they were startled for a moment themselves as the ghostlike figures nodded in the mist.

CHAPTER XXIV

A SUCCESSFUL RUSE

"HOW near are we to this German regiment?" Leon inquired.

"I've no idea. Our scouts probably have located them, however."

They marched on in silence for some distance when Leon suddenly turned to Jacques.

"I just happened to think," he exclaimed. "What is there to prevent us from being shot down along with the Germans? If we are successful in leading them into our trap I don't see how our troops can tell us apart."

Jacques merely laughed at this. "I forgot that you don't understand French very well," he said. "Consequently you didn't hear what was said about that."

"No, of course I didn't."

"This is what we are to do. Just before we reach the scarecrows on our fake retreat we are to turn off sharply to the left. The Germans won't be able to see us in this fog and they'll keep straight ahead, at least we hope they will."

"Well, how are we going to tell when we ourselves are close to the scarecrows?"

"Don't worry about that. We will have men posted to warn us."

"All right, then," said Leon. "Now that everything is provided for I am anxious to start the fun. Bring on your Germans!"

"You'll see them soon enough, and it will be a ticklish piece of work too, I can tell you. We'd better not talk any more either or we may get in trouble."

On through the fog they went. Now and again a halt was called, while a few men were sent ahead to see if they were approaching the Germans. Upon receiving a report that they had not yet come within striking distance, the order was given to proceed once more. This occurred several times and on every new occasion additional caution was exercised. Evidently it was expected that the Germans would be encountered at any moment now.

Only a small proportion of the French were armed with rifles. These soldiers took the front rank and were to fire a few volleys into the ranks of the Germans when they should come within range. The rest of the men were merely to show themselves and give the impression that their forces were considerable. The number of men sent on the expedition was believed to be suffi-

ciently large to tempt the Germans into pursuing them.

After each volley it was planned that the French should retreat a few yards into the fog. The idea was to expose themselves as little as possible, but continually to draw on the enemy.

"This will be our last stop before the fun begins, I think," whispered Jacques when they had halted for at least the sixth time.

"I hope so," answered Leon. "I'm beginning to get nervous and I wish something would happen."

"Here we go," exclaimed Jacques as the word came to advance.

In open formation the French slowly moved forward. Their line was spread over considerable ground and every man was left more or less to his own devices. At a time like this it was almost impossible to maintain any regular formation. The orders had been issued and the men were expected to follow them to the best of their ability.

Slowly and cautiously they crept forward. The game they were playing was a dangerous one and great caution was necessary. Leon and Jacques had kept side by side and they both saw the Germans at the same moment. A dark mass suddenly loomed up through the mist in front of them, and the two boys immediately stopped.

Their companions had also seen the Germans. The soldiers that had guns fired into the midst of the regiment halted there before them, and then all the French immediately retreated. Not so far, however, as to lose sight of their foes who returned their fire at once.

Sharp commands could be heard as they were issued by the German officers. The pursuit of the French who had dared to fire on them was started with no loss of time. It was evidently the opinion of the German officers that a considerable force of the French had blundered upon them in the fog and they were determined to waste no time in joining battle.

Neither Leon nor Jacques was armed except for their automatic revolvers, but they played their part well. After each volley they turned and ran rapidly in the direction whence they had come and continued until they were out of sight of the Germans. Then they stopped and waited with the rest of their company until the oncoming Germans once more appeared. Then the same maneuver was repeated.

That the ruse was working successfully was made plain by the fact that the Germans still pursued them. They fired many shots on their part also, but as far as Leon or Jacques could tell none of their own men had been struck. It was also likely that the French bullets had done slight

damage. In so dense a fog it was out of the question to shoot accurately, unless one knew the range. The reserve troops waiting on the three sides of the dummy army in the rear, had obtained the range, however, and if they should ever get an opportunity to shoot, they would unquestionably cause a great deal of havoc.

"It's working like a charm, Jacques," exclaimed Leon excitedly, as they halted after one of their short retreats.

"So far it is," replied Jacques. "I hope I live to see it end successfully."

As he finished speaking a bullet whined past them, making its way directly between the two young soldiers. They both ducked involuntarily, though they knew that of course the bullet must have already passed them or they could not have heard it.

"Whew, that was close!" exclaimed Jacques.

"Too close for comfort I should say," replied Leon. "I wouldn't mind it so much if we only had a couple of rifles and could return the compliment."

"We have our pistols."

"It would only be a waste of ammunition to fire them."

"Perhaps you're right. Here they come again, anyway."

The shadowy forms of the Germans once more

appeared, advancing through the mist. A volley was fired by the French and then as before they all turned and ran. Bullets whistled over their heads and the spiteful bark of the German guns sounded over the field.

"The Germans are using more guns than they were," exclaimed Leon.

"I think they are. The whole regiment must be after us now."

"We must be getting near home, too, I should think."

"It seems so, but it is hard to tell in this fog."

"Let's hope we are going in the right direction anyway."

"We're all right enough on that score, I'm sure," said Jacques confidently.

Again the Germans appeared. Again the French fired a volley and once more they turned and ran. They had covered only a few paces, when they encountered the sentries posted near the army of scarecrows.

"This way, Leon! This way!" shouted Jacques.

"Go ahead, I'll follow right behind you," responded Leon, and veering sharply to their left the two young soldiers ran at top speed for their lives. To have remained where they were would have meant almost certain death, for on three sides of the field were hundreds of French rifles

and at least a score of machine guns. All were trained upon the very spot which the two boys were fast leaving behind them in their mad flight.

"Run, Leon, run!" panted Jacques.

"I'm running all right," gasped Leon, who was only a stride behind his friend. On all sides of them were other men of their force, every man putting forth his best efforts to cover the ground as rapidly as possible. It was a strange sight to see all these ghostly figures fleeing through the mist and Leon could not help comparing the scene with the start of a gigantic cross-country race. This was a race for life, however. At any moment the French guns might open fire and woe to any man caught in that deadly rain of lead.

Suddenly Jacques stumbled. His foot had caught in a bramble and before he could regain his balance he plunged forward and fell prone on his face. Leon, only a step behind, was unable to change his course in time to save himself and he too fell headlong over the prostrate body of his young companion.

Both were slightly stunned for a moment and before they could recover themselves and start again the battle began. From all sides came the spit of the rifles and the rattle of machine guns. While they were at least seventy-five yards distant from the scarecrows, the two young soldiers

were still between the battle lines and their plight was a serious one.

"Quick, Jacques! Come over here!" exclaimed Leon. He had discovered a huge boulder near at hand and in the shelter of this great rock the two boys took refuge.

"We're in for it now," panted Jacques as he scrambled to a place alongside his companion. "What a fool I was to trip that way."

"Never mind that, Jacques. You couldn't help it."

"It was so clumsy of me, though."

"Forget about it and listen to those guns. We'd better give thanks that we are where we are and not where that German regiment is just now."

"I wonder if they're in the trap."

"There's no doubt of it," said Leon confidently. "Just as we got on our feet again I heard them cheer. They had evidently caught sight of the scarecrows, mistaken them for our soldiers and started to charge. I suppose that when they cheered that was the signal for our men to open fire."

"Poor fellows, I feel sort of sorry for them now. Just think, it was my suggestion that brought them to their destruction, too."

"This is war, Jacques," exclaimed Leon.

"How many times have you reminded me of that fact? You did your duty and you'll probably be promoted."

"What nonsense," said Jacques quickly. He disliked to hear himself praised and immediately changed the subject. "Listen to our guns," he cried. "There won't be a single German left in a few moments if it keeps up at this rate."

"They're returning the fire, all right," said Leon. "Look there."

He pointed as he spoke to a furrow in the soft earth not four feet from where they were sitting. A shot had struck that spot and plowed up the ground for a distance of almost a foot.

"That was coming our way, too," exclaimed Jacques.

"It certainly was, and I don't like this seat very much either."

"Where can we go? We are at least safe from our own guns here and they would be more likely to hit us than the Germans."

"I know it," said Leon ruefully. "I realize that we can't move, but that doesn't make me like our position any better."

The firing kept up incessantly. The Germans had replied strongly to it at first, but little by little their resistance weakened. Evidently they had become bewildered when they discovered the trap into which they had been led. Then too the

rain of bullets poured into their midst out of the fog must have further added to their confusion. The best of discipline and the very stoutest of hearts might well fail under such circumstances.

"Our men don't seem to be easing up any, do they?" said Leon after a few moments in which he and Jacques sat in silence, huddled up close to their protecting boulder.

"Not much. I guess they want to do the job up right."

"But they can't see what they're shooting at."

"They don't need to. With all those machine guns they can sweep practically every inch of the ground and a man wouldn't stand a ghost of a show to escape alive."

"Thank goodness for this big rock is all I can say," ejaculated Leon.

"I should say so. Listen to that!"

On the opposite side of their stone refuge could be heard the patter of bullets striking hard and fast. This continued for a moment while the two young soldiers crouched lower and lower in an effort to make themselves as inconspicuous as possible. The hail of lead could next be heard playing over the ground nearby. The earth flew up in tiny clouds and the bullets striking the leaves and bushes, sounded like the patter of heavy hailstones during a summer shower.

"Tell them to fire somewhere else, Jacques,"

exclaimed Leon. "It makes me nervous to have them so near to us."

"They can't hit us," said Jacques confidently. "They're just making sure that they aren't going to miss any one. It would be too bad if any of the Germans should be slighted."

"I wish we could see what is going on."

"Well, I'm glad the Germans can't see us."

"That's true, but by this time I guess they wouldn't do us very much damage."

"No, I should say not," agreed Jacques. "Don't I feel a little breeze blowing now? If I do this fog will go away and we'll be able to see what has happened here in front of us."

"Yes, I think there is a breeze," said Leon. "We should be able to get back to our lines in a few moments if it only keeps up."

CHAPTER XXV

CONCLUSION

THE breeze freshened, and, as it blew over the battlefield, the fog slowly lifted. Little by little the mist cleared away and presently it became possible to distinguish objects at a considerable distance.

Firing on the part of the Germans had almost ceased. Now and again the sound of rifle shots was heard, coming from the place that the army of scarecrows had occupied, but the shots were few and far between. The French guns too were practically silent.

"The fight is over, I guess," exclaimed Leon at last.

"So it seems. I'd like to see what has become of that German regiment, though," replied Jacques. "I wonder if many escaped."

"I don't see how they could escape. Anyway, we'll be able to see in a few moments now. I wonder who it is that is doing the firing down there."

"There can't be many of them."

"No, indeed, but I don't see how it is that any one would stay there if he was alive and could walk."

"How could they get away?" demanded Jacques.

"We held them on only three sides. They could retreat the way they came."

"No, they couldn't either. As soon as the firing began, we sent troops to close up that gap too. They were caught in a complete trap."

"A pretty good scheme of yours, Jacques, I should say," exclaimed Leon. "Look," he added quickly. "There are the men who are doing all the shooting."

The fog suddenly swept clear the field where once the German regiment had stood. And what a sight it was that greeted the gaze of the two young soldiers crouched behind the boulder. The ground seemed to be literally covered with the bodies of the dead and wounded. The entire regiment practically had been annihilated.

Apparently only five of the Germans were left. They lay prone on their stomachs, and as rapidly as they could load their rifles they used them to show their defiance of their French foes. The five men went coolly about their task, and, formed in a circle, they presented a bold front to their opponents on every side.

"What a sight!" exclaimed Leon. "There are

certainly five brave men left on that field. Did you ever see anything like that?"

"I never did," replied Jacques.

"Look there," said Leon. "Our men are giving them a cheer."

Sure enough the French soldiers, always ready to admire and applaud bravery, in a great cheer were voicing their regard for the five brave Germans. The French firing had entirely ceased, and as the cheer rang out over the blood-stained battlefield, the five Germans rose to their feet. They held up their hands in token of surrender, and once more they were loudly cheered.

A squad of soldiers made their way out from the French lines, the Germans surrendered their arms and were led back as prisoners.

Then the Red Cross workers immediately prepared to do all in their power for the sufferers on the field. Ambulances were brought up and the doctors and surgeons set to work to administer the first aid to the injured.

"Let's move!" said Jacques suddenly. He and Leon had been sitting as if stunned while they watched the proceedings in front of them. The full realization of the terrible punishment inflicted on the German regiment had not dawned on them at first.

"Yes," agreed Leon soberly. "Let's move."

They arose to their feet and looked about them.

A hundred yards away were their own lines and toward these they walked, leaving the vivid picture of destruction and war behind them. As they neared the trenches they were hailed by their companions who expressed great surprise at seeing them come from that direction.

"I meant to look at that boulder," said Leon suddenly. "I wanted to see what damage those bullets did to the other side of it."

"I looked at it," said Jacques. "All I can say is that it was a lucky thing for us that we were not in the way of that gun."

"Did they do very much to the boulder?"

"Not such a great deal. They were only machine gun bullets."

"They would be enough to fix us though, I guess," said Leon quietly.

"If you don't think so, just look behind you and see what they did to the Germans. They ought to convince you soon."

"I don't need to be convinced, thanks."

They arrived at the trenches and received a hearty welcome. Great curiosity was expressed by their fellow soldiers as to how they happened to be where they were. When the circumstances were related by Jacques there was many a laugh, and many exclamations at the luck of the two boys in happening to find themselves so near a shelter.

"I'm getting so I almost count on being lucky

now," said Leon some time later when he and Jacques were talking over their experiences.

"I almost expect it myself," laughed Jacques. "You know I always protested that it was wrong for you to talk about our luck the way you did, but I am beginning to think there may be something in it after all."

The two boys were lying on their blankets in their tent. They had been ordered to withdraw from the trenches, while fresh troops took their places just as they themselves had relieved others a short time before. Both young soldiers were in need of rest and the chance to enjoy a few hours of it had been most welcome to them. At the same time they did not wish to leave the trenches. Something about the battle line, its dangers and excitements appealed to them strongly and as soon as they should be rested they were aware that they would be eager once more to take their places at the front.

They were now preparing to turn in and rest for a few hours, and as boys often do before going to sleep they were talking over the events of the day.

"We've certainly given it to the Germans hard the last two days," said Jacques exultantly. "A few more days like these and we'll have them on the run."

"Don't forget this, though," warned Leon.

"This battle line is at least two hundred miles long and things may have turned out the other way 'round in many of the places where fighting is going on."

"That's very true," agreed Jacques, "but let me tell you one thing. The Germans are beaten right now."

"That's a pretty strong statement."

"I know it is, and I guess I've made it to you before too. Just the same I believe that last week when the French and English crumpled up General von Kluck's army and drove it back from Paris, that meant final victory for the Allies. It will be some time coming but it will get here all right."

"Let's hope so anyway. Not that I mind fighting, for I don't a bit. In fact I rather like it, but as long as I am enlisted on the side of the Allies I naturally want to see them win."

"I wonder what people in America think of this war," said Jacques.

"I too would like to know. You see I haven't heard a word from any of my family since I first enlisted, 'way back in the early part of last month."

"Where do you think your brother is?"

"I haven't the least idea. You know I left him in England last July, and I haven't heard from him since."

"You wrote him, though?"

"Oh, yes," said Leon. "Of course I wrote him and my family too, just as soon as I enlisted. I'm not sure that they have received my letters though, and I'm very sure that I have received none from them."

"But how could you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why," said Jacques, "they probably have no idea where you are even if they do know you have enlisted. How could they send a letter to you?"

"I never really thought of that," laughed Leon. "I'd feel better if I was sure they knew where I am. They wouldn't worry so much."

"No," laughed Jacques, "I suppose they wouldn't worry at all. If they only knew what you'd been doing I guess they'd think you were just as safe as you would be in your own bed."

"Oh, well, it can't be helped now anyway. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if Earl himself had enlisted."

"Earl is your brother, isn't he?"

"Yes, and he's just as apt to turn up here any time as not. I wouldn't be a bit surprised to see him arrive here at—"

Before he could finish the sentence the flap of the tent was lifted and a man's arm appeared, thrust through the opening.

Leon caught his breath and stared at the entrance to the tent with wide open eyes. Could it be possible that his prediction was coming true and that his twin brother Earl had really arrived? It seemed odd anyway, that just as he was speaking of such a thing some one should come to their tent. His suspicions proved to be unfounded, however.

The owner of the arm was an orderly with a letter for Jacques. He handed it to the young soldier and then withdrew.

"Whew!" exclaimed Leon. "That fellow gave me a bad start. For a few seconds I felt sure that Earl had arrived here. What's your letter, Jacques?"

Jacques made no reply. He was reading his letter and was so deeply interested in its contents that he did not even hear his friend's question.

"I suppose we're ordered away somewhere," exclaimed Leon. "Oh, well, I don't care if we are, as long as we aren't sent to East Prussia or Poland or some place like that. It's too cold over there in the winter time."

Jacques made no response, but merely handed his missive to Leon without any comment. The young Frenchman's face was wreathed in smiles, however.

Leon looked at the letter. "I can't read that, Jacques," he said. "It's all in French and I

could only make out half of what it says. Translate it into English and read it out loud to me."

Jacques laughed. "Are you sure you want to hear it?" he asked.

"How do I know? I don't know what is in it."

"All right," said Jacques, "here goes. It is sent from Staff Headquarters, wherever they are. The name of the place is censored. Here's the rest of it,—'Privates Jacques Dineau and Leon Platt, attached to the 106th regiment, Fifteenth Army Corps of the army of the Republic of France, have this day been awarded the medal of honor for distinguished service and for bravery on the field of battle.' It is signed 'Joffre.'"

"Don't fool me," warned Leon. "You'll regret it if you do."

"I'm not fooling you," exclaimed Jacques. "I read you exactly what was in the letter. What do you think of it?"

"Is it really true?"

"Of course it is."

With a wild whoop of joy Leon sprang to his feet and waved his hands about his head. At least he tried to do these things, but the very cramped quarters which he and Jacques occupied prevented him from fully expressing his feelings. At length he subsided and resumed his place on the floor.

"That's the greatest piece of news I ever had," he panted.

"It's pretty nice, isn't it?" said Jacques.

"*Pretty* nice!" exclaimed Leon. "*Pretty* nice! Well, I should say so. You know," he added. "I'd like to quit the army right now and just pin that medal on my chest and walk around and let people envy me my good luck."

"But we won't quit the army," said Jacques.

"No, I guess not, but I'd like to on that account."

"You're not serious, are you?"

"No, of course I'm not. I wouldn't stop now if I had a chance."

"That's the way to talk, Leon!" exclaimed Jacques, heartily. "For a moment I thought you were serious."

"I should say not. I was only joking when I said I wanted to. There are two things I do want, though."

"What are they?"

"One thing is sleep."

"I want some of that myself. What is the other?"

"The other is to get back in the trenches as soon as possible."

"We'll be there again to-morrow, I hope. Let's get some sleep now anyway."

The two young soldiers stretched themselves

on their blankets and made ready to enjoy a well deserved rest.

"Good-night, Leon," said Jacques.

"Good-night," responded Leon.

In a remarkably short time the only sound to be heard within the tent was the regular breathing of two, tired, but proud young soldiers of the army of France.

THE END

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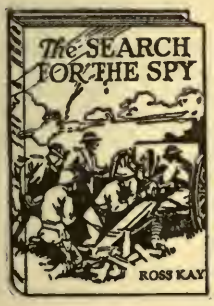

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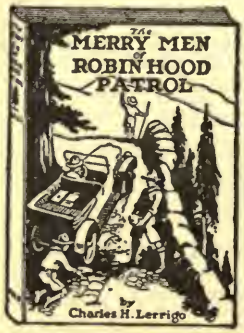

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